

for Jane, on our thirty-fourth

Accents of Remorse

The good has never been perfect.

There is always some flaw in it, some defect.

First Sightings

For all the attention paid to the “interview” scene in Benjamin Britten’s opera *Billy Budd*, its musical depths have proved remarkably resistant to analysis and have remained unplumbed. This striking passage of thirty-four whole-note chords has probably attracted more comment than any other in the opera since Andrew Porter first spotted shortly after the 1951 premiere that all the chords harmonize members of the F major triad, leading to much discussion over whether or not the passage is “in F major.”¹ Beyond Porter’s perception, the structure was far from obvious, perhaps in some way unprecedented, and has remained mysterious. Indeed, it is the undisputed gnomic power of its strangeness that attracted (and still attracts) most comment. Arnold Whittall has shown that no functional harmonic or contrapuntal explanation of the passage is satisfactory, and proceeded from there to make the interesting assertion that that was the point: The “creative indecision”² that characterizes the music of the opera was meant to confront the listener with the same sort of difficulty as the layers of irony in Herman Melville’s “inside narrative,” on which the opera is based.

To quote a single sentence of the original story that itself contains several layers of ironic ambiguity, a sentence thought by some—I believe mistakenly—to say that Vere felt no remorse:

1. Andrew Porter, “Britten’s *Billy Budd*,” *Music & Letters*, 33 (April 1952): 111–18; for quotations from and discussion of the literature, see Arnold Whittall, “‘Twisted Relations’: Method and Meaning in Britten’s *Billy Budd*,” *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 2,2 (July 1990): 145–71 (pp. 152–56, for quotes); also Barry Emslie, “*Billy Budd* and the Fear of Words,” *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 4,1 (March 1992): 43–59; and Shannon McKellar, “Re-visioning the ‘Missing’ Scene: Critical and Tonal Trajectories in Britten’s *Billy Budd*,” *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 122 (1997): 258–80. McKellar includes a historical curiosity, the interview scene from the play of *Billy Budd* by Louis Coxé and Robert Chapman (pp. 271–72), which played on Broadway in 1951 (the same year as the opera was premiered).

2. Whittall, 168ff.

the narrator mentions that the person attending the drugged Vere on his deathbed told one of his officers that Vere had murmured “words inexplicable to his attendant: ‘Billy Budd,’” then goes on: “That these were not the accents of remorse would seem clear from what the attendant said to the *Bellipotent*’s senior officer of marines, who, as the most reluctant to condemn of the members of the drumhead court, too well knew, though here he kept the knowledge to himself, who Billy Budd was.”³

First, notice that this sentence describes the senior marine officer’s impression of what he thought the attendant was implying in his report—at least two removes of interpretation from the event itself, even if one does not include the narrator of the story in the reckoning—and all carefully hedged with the words “would seem clear.” Then note that the officer’s doubts about the attendant’s understanding are signaled by his *not* questioning it, out of politeness, perhaps, or from a feeling that a subordinate’s opinion is of no great concern. That the officer knows better than the attendant is explicitly stated, though not precisely what he knows: the mention of his sympathy for Budd in the court implies either that he may believe that Vere should have felt remorse and therefore probably did or that he knows what Vere’s true feelings concerning Budd were. Finally, because the context of this sentence is the concluding pages of the story, where Melville with deadpan but bitter humor relates how everything we have ourselves witnessed was completely misunderstood by the world, what reports there were getting wrong who was the hero and who the villain, for example, it is a mistake to take it at face value. Yet it has often been taken just that way.

Then again, if it is true in the story that the name was not spoken in the “accents of remorse,” what accents were they spoken in? Most commentators assume that the passage indicates some resolution in Vere’s mind, as in Donald Mitchell’s characteristically generous assessment.⁴ This is the crux, too, of disagreements over the opera: Is the ending conclusive, with Vere finding a

3. Herman Melville, *Billy Budd*, ch. 28. Note that the numbering of later chapters has changed in modern editions, and Melville’s final choice of a name for the ship (determined by manuscript studies) was not, as it was thought to be when the opera was written, the *Indomitable*.

4. Donald Mitchell, “A *Billy Budd* Notebook,” in Mervyn Cooke and Philip Reed, eds., *Benjamin Britten: Billy Budd*, Cambridge Opera Handbook (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 111–34 (p.133). The title of the article, implying random jottings, belies its depth.

kind of salvation, or is he haunted and destined repeatedly to cast his thoughts back “to that faraway summer of seventeen hundred and ninety-seven” (despite his assertion that his “mind can go back in peace”)?

“Creative indecision” remains a plausible critical idea, and valuable in bolstering Whittall’s argument that the ending, far from resolving the issues of the opera, maintains a “knife edge” balance—correct, in my view. That much granted, however, even if musical indecision was intended to be the analog of Melville’s ambiguities, the analyst is not absolved thereby from trying to discover how the music works, for, as Whittall says, the “strangeness remains.”⁵

Most of the responses to the interview chords have been more impressionistic. Donald Mitchell’s feeling that Britten had in mind a specific program for the sequence⁶—a sense many may well have shared—must remain (as he acknowledges) a fantasy, however much it reflects one’s experience, in the absence of any testimony or written evidence from the composer. Even as recently as the first years of this century, analysis seldom had more to say than, in effect, “F major, then A major, then . . .” What *all* comment on the interview has had in common is a conviction—that there is almost no musical “information” conveyed—whether the critic proceeds thence to find the scene successful in creating an appropriate experience in the audience or not. Musical scholars have written sophisticated discussions of the scene in terms drawn from sociology, literary theory, philosophy, linguistics, theology, and so on, yet one might be forgiven for sensing compensation at work. Ideas flicker and slide by at an impressive rate, but though the musical specimens are mounted and labeled, the most basic taxonomy is deferred.⁷

5. Whittall, 170; 157.

6. Mitchell, 122. Compare how Mitchell’s view has evolved in the afterword (pp.133–34).

7. See appendix 1 for some cavils about Philip Rupprecht’s chapter on *Billy Budd* in *Britten’s Musical Language* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), which in many ways—particularly his discussion of the narrative role of the orchestra—is very good and certainly worth reading.

In the same issue of the *Cambridge Opera Journal* as Whittall’s piece, the then fashionable dismissal of analysis as the imposition of false unity is rehearsed in several other articles. One has to agree that analysis can do that—and perhaps all too often does—but one ought not throw out the recent expression of a genome with the billions of molecules that happen to share a phase at roughly the same space-time coordinates, in which that genomic expression is immersed.

An exemplar of the literature—most convincing in its own terms—is Barry Emslie’s discussion of the opera with respect to three thematic areas: the social, the sexual, and the spiritual.⁸ I hesitate to try to summarize his argument because of its subtlety, but he views the opera as both great and failed. The failure, for him, is that the opera raises issues that its authors were not prepared to contend with fully, and its greatness ultimately lies in their leaving unhidden their inability to deal with those issues (whether intentionally or not). The opera “foregrounds its own deconstruction”—and does so in the very scene, the interview, with which the present essay launches its consideration of the opera.

Emslie believes that the apparent lack of reference to leitmotifs in the scene is what enacts this to him self-evident structural fact. Like a speech act, however, music cannot simply leave something unsaid; it must say *something*.⁹ Given the variety of imagery provoked by the thirty-four chords (“all the ink spilled,” as Emslie says), they are evidently evocative, even if, like Emslie, one can find nothing common to critics’ varied reactions.

So a first question is, would some other set of variously orchestrated chords of varying loudness have done as well to acknowledge the authors’ inability to impose artistic order on the troublesome ideas they invoked? Emslie would surely give an answer in the affirmative (though he might legitimately want to qualify it). I’m not so sure, and this essay in part will test the limits of such qualifications: That is to say, if one agrees that the importance of the chords rests in their failure to communicate, and thus an implicit acknowledgment the opera’s ultimate lack of wholeness, one will at least come to understand just how they do that. Alternatively, one will be convinced that “only *these* chords” would serve, which is our characteristic response to successful artifice. (We want wholeness, and we enjoy it, even if it is in fact always illusory.)

The latter result (the one I admittedly hope for) would among other things more adequately explain Emslie’s paradox that the chords *successfully* reveal the opera’s failure. Therefore, I want to show that the meaning of the chords need not remain “forever unclear,” as Emslie believes. His reliance on the paucity of motives and on Whittall’s claim of thoroughgoing

8. See n.1, above.

9. Mitchell, in the Cambridge Opera Handbook (p.168, n.11) tells the story of Britten not understanding why a singer in *Death in Venice* kept missing his entrance—“I’ve *told* him exactly when he should enter,” meaning *in the music*.

harmonic ambiguity keeps him from seeing that despite the wide variety of images the thirty-four chords call up in critics, there is common ground, and its source is in the music. (Emslie's appeal to the difficulty some audience members have sitting quietly through the chords seems an uncharacteristically low blow: Wouldn't some of the fidgeters likely have a similar reaction to a lecture about the "post-structuralist gap" in the opera? Opera is aimed at a wider audience than his essay, he might reply. Yet, if Britten had lowered his sights to the level of incapacity of the audience members least equipped to deal with his art, wouldn't *Billy Budd* not only be a "failure" but a deeply uninteresting one? Imagine the coughing and rustling of programs had Britten been Cagey enough simply to leave silence as a token of what remains unsaid.)

My major gripe with Emslie—as with most of the others—is, then, a lack of in-depth musical analysis. Insisting on this, I do at times feel a bit like a denizen of the boiler room who, sweaty and with oil-stained brow, stumbles into a cocktail party held in the captain's cabin for the best-heeled of the passengers. The conversation is clever, even brilliant, but never gets very far beyond the surface—or when it does, it leaps into the depths of the half-baked like any big idea offered in that sort of inappropriate setting.

A close examination of the musical nuts and bolts of what it seems right to call this "scene" (and not just because it is performed with the curtain up) is long overdue. Undertaken with a view to establishing exactly what can be said with assurance about how the passage is constructed, it then might serve as a basis for better-founded discussions of what the passage means in the context of the work as a whole. I am going to propose a number of possible models that may, at least partially, explain the passage. Having explored the limits of their usefulness, I will suggest that the opera as a whole shares with the interview certain features that can be described as occupying the border between tonality and nontonality, and showing elements of both. In the course of analyzing several scenes of the opera, I will then attempt to show that Britten, far from using an ambiguous or inconclusive language, was able to find a unified harmonic organization using hexachords that allows for expressions more tonal at times and more nontonal at others. Finally, I hope to demonstrate that the pervasiveness of this hexachordal organization, from surface motives to large-scale structures, ultimately has a deep thematic connection with the issues raised by the libretto, that the interview is fully integrated musically with the rest of the opera and therefore also with respect to these issues, and that Britten's stance

toward these issues may not be as thoroughly ambivalent as the ostensible ambiguity of the opera (however artistically justifiable it might be) has led critics to aver.

THE INTERVIEW AS TRIADIC BUT NONTONAL MUSIC

Perhaps we should consider the possibility that the interview music being made up of nothing but triads has misdirected critics as to its nature; that, in fact, it is one of Britten's first experiments with a kind of *serial* organization, if an idiosyncratic and maybe even somewhat ad hoc one.¹⁰ It might resemble certain passages in *Wozzeck* in this regard—Britten at one time had hoped to study with Berg—though in Berg's opera the chords are not triads (e.g., the chord series underlying act 1, scene 2, or act 2, scene 4). Only three years after *Billy Budd*, Britten would write what is acknowledged to be the serially organized *Turn of the Screw*.

At any rate, what I am calling serialism in *Billy Budd* involves the arrangement of musical objects in time according to a rule that may be as simple as “Don't repeat an object until you have used all the others” or “If you repeat, do so in reverse order,” or so complicated that it is easier to exemplify the rule than to state it. (An instance of the latter would be the ordering of the chords in the second half of the passage, which I will discuss in connection with example 2.)

Given that the top-voice tones harmonized in the interview are the members of the F major triad, F, A, and C, and that each of the three tones can be harmonized in three ways, as the root, 3rd, or 5th, of either major or minor triads, there are eighteen ($3 \times 3 \times 2$) different chords available. Naturally, some of the *triads* are the same, e.g., F major with F on top and F major with C on top, but considering the apparent import (whatever it may be) of the pitches in the top line, it makes sense to distinguish between them. Example 1a shows the eighteen chords in an arbitrary generative order labeled with letters *a–m*. I use abstraction initially in the hope of making the discovery of patterns easier; once the significance of the various chords—and probably their groupings—is clarified, I will return to more familiar nomenclature. I have made a distinction between two chords that are the same triad but have different tones on top with a superscript numeral, thus: a^1 is F major with the root, F, on top; a^5 is the same triad with the 5th,

10. Both Whittall, 156–57, and Donald Mitchell, in the *Cambridge Opera Handbook*, 121–22, considered such an approach but did not carry it through.

C, on top. Should there be some significance to the triadic identity of two such chords—a harmonic overlay to the serial organization—it will thus at least not be hidden by the arbitrary labeling. In the interview (act 2, R.102–103)¹¹ and in two later related passages (R.117–118 and R.143–144), however, for some reason Britten did not use four of the eighteen available chords at all: b^5 , F minor with C on top, and a^3 , c^5 , and h^1 , the three *diatonic* (in F major) harmonizations of A. (As Whittall notes, he did use all of the thirteen *different* triads.) Why the chords I just listed were avoided is a question to be returned to, though because it concerns something the composer did *not* do, it may ultimately be unanswerable.

In the absence of functional harmony or counterpoint argued for by Whittall, one expects the inversions of the triads to be of less concern, and that does seem true in this passage, if not with some of Britten's music. I have not discovered any governing principle in the bass;¹² and while there is voice-leading, at least implicitly, whenever two chords are heard in succession, it would seem to play a supporting role, highlighting a structure established in other ways (see the inner-voice chromatic lines shown in example 2, for instance). The only repetition of any bass pattern that may have ramifications beyond the interview begins with the loudest chord, m (which subsequently becomes the first repeated chord): $A\flat$, D, $B\flat$. It is heard again a major 3rd higher, C, $F\sharp$, D, at R.103 –5–3. The transposition by 4 semitones is not accidental because it ensures the same pitch content in an important subset of the aggregate of each set of three chords. The significance of this will become clear as we proceed.

In the first eighteen bars (R.102 through the first bar of R.103), all fourteen of the chords Britten did use appear, without repetition until the eleventh bar; after that, the remaining unused chords alternate with repeated chords. Again, questions to be addressed: Why the alternation, and why just at that point? After R.103, the chords are noticeably more repetitious, a^1 –k being repeated no fewer than five times (the last time with j intervening). Not coincidentally, the

11. All references are to the two-act revised version of 1961. R.12+3 means the third bar after the bar marked with rehearsal number 12, or the *fourth* bar of the passage; R.12 –3 is the antepenultimate bar of the section that begins with number 11.

12. Whittall (p.159) notes the use of inversions that put the diatonic tones of F major in the bass, but there are several exceptions: $A\flat$ and $F\sharp$, both twice.

dynamic range and the variety of instrumentation is much reduced as well, and the diminished contrasts and increased repetition make the organization considerably clearer. Example 1b shows the passage, in the vocal score reduction, labeled with the arbitrary letters. Letters labeling repeated chords are set in bold at their first appearance and are underscored once for each repetition, to make evident to the eye what is quite audible, namely, that repetition comes to prevail in the second half of the passage.

The ordering of the chords in the first part seems in fact designed to heighten the contrast from chord to chord by maximizing cross-relations, an effect also enhanced by the contrasts in dynamic level, instrumentation, and registral disposition. The effect is like a cinematic montage of close-up “stills” of two faces,¹³ and this may well be the source of the sense of a dialog that Mitchell and others (I include myself) have experienced.

What else can be said about the ordering of the triads, purely descriptively? Example 1c shows that the top voice, in the first part of the passage, seems to refer to the second half of the sixteenth-note fanfare motive that announces the arrival of the impressed sailors, including Billy, and of Claggart in act 1. (While the leitmotifs of *Billy Budd* are notoriously indefinite in their referents,¹⁴ there is no question that this motive is associated with Billy, if not only with him.) Note that the full motive has a rough symmetry about the C in the middle: F-*x*-F-A-|C|-A-F-*x*-F, where the *x* represents some pitch between repeated Fs. (I should mention that the last F is often elided when the motive is repeated on another scale degree.) The motive is further divisible into the two subunits of what Schenker would call boundary play (F-*x*-F)¹⁵ and arpeggiation (F-A-C), but we shall have no further occasion to refer to these subunits; I note them simply for the sake of completeness.

In the interview passage, the first ten chords harmonize C-A-F-C-F (labeled *x*) twice. The second statement of the motive (labeled *x*¹) could be seen as varied by an extension (the repetition of the last two pitches, C–F); perhaps the first repetition of a chord (*m*) occurs in connection with this extension, as an echo of what has been the loudest chord. This is followed

13. I wonder if Britten ever saw Carl Dreyer’s film *Passion de Jeanne d’Arc*.

14. See for instance, Emslie, 45; Rupprecht, *Britten’s Musical Language*, 82.

15. Heinrich Schenker, *Free Composition*, tr. Ernst Oster (New York: Longman, 1979), §260. pp. 103–104 (fig.124).

by another variation in which the first three pitches are repeated; or the three notes could be viewed as a truncated reference to the motive followed by a variation (x^2) in which the extension is itself varied, substituting A–F for C–F. Because Britten revised the second half of the passage by cutting five chords in the pencil sketch,¹⁶ the motivic organization of the final version (ex. 1c) is accompanied by the end of the first version on the staff below. Evidently, his original plan was a kind of composed-out *ritardando* involving the repetition of the pitches of the motive, though displaced registrally. There is only one immediate repetition of a pitch in the top voice in the final version, and it *resulted* from the deletions. Note that the revisions increase the symmetry of the motivic organization, although it is still not exact.¹⁷

If the top line was worked out first, then the repetition of the chords in the first half of the passage might have become necessary because the pitches in the line did not match the chords available: the pitches harmonized by repeated chords are c (twice), a, and f, but the remaining unused chords have c and a (three times) as their top tones. In other words, Britten was forced in any case to omit some chords and repeat others, and chose—following the second criterion apparently governing the choice of chords in the passage, harmonic contrast—to repeat chords that were more chromatic.

The top voice in the second part of the passage might also seem to refer to Claggart's (and Vere's) "O beauty, o handsomeness, goodness" (act 1, R.105–109 *passim*, and act 2, R. 99+15–16, respectively) in the repetition of the descending 4th, F–C (harmonized by the fivefold a^1 –k). The last five tones in the top voice present the motive heard in the first part in retrograde, F–C–F–A–C.

Such a taxonomic approach can take us little farther, but we have not exhausted all straightforward description. Example 2 is a metrical reduction of the top line, and it reveals some interesting features of both halves of the interview. Because the features of the second half are clearer (and ultimately, more audible), I discuss them first.

16. Described by Whittall, n.32 (p.152) and shown in *Letters from a Life: The Selected Letters of Benjamin Britten 1913–1976, Volume Three 1946–1951*, Donald Mitchell, Philip Reed, and Mervyn Cooke (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 688.

17. Any random array of only three elements is likely to have some symmetries, so those discovered here, though they appear to be significant, may not be.

Starting with the last new chord, a^1 , at R.103, the structural principle governing the music shifts from the unfolding of the chord series to an oscillation between the last new chord and chord k , one of the chords already repeated (R.102+12) in the alternation of used and unused chords at the end of the first half of the passage. The instrumentation, woodwinds for a^1 and horns for k , thereafter remains unchanged. This oscillation is interrupted by the recall of four other chords in the brass and strings, j , i , m , and d , then j once more (marked with asterisks in example 1b). Using W, H, B, and S to designate the *instrumental* groups involved, the pattern can be summarized as follows:

W—H W-[B]-W—H [B] W-[S]-W—H [S] W—H W-[B]-H

After the first alternation of the woodwinds and horns (W—H), the woodwinds are interrupted by the brass, then the brass are heard again before the next alternation. The same pattern recurs with the strings instead of the brass, followed by an uninterrupted alternation of winds and horns. After the last “term” in the series, W-[B]-H, where the brass repeat chord j , the next might have been W-[S]-H, with the strings playing chord i —or something else; the point is that the sense of a process that can be extrapolated has been established. In contrast to the first half of the interview as it appears in the pencil sketch, which shows no revisions—arguably supporting the idea of a plan, whether serial or not—the final pattern in the second half emerged, as we observed, by cutting five chords. This confirms that the pattern was not created by following some precompositional rule, but discovered by pruning. The pattern does, for all that, remain an *abstract* one, and the second half of the passage shares with the putatively rule-derived first half the sense of musical objects being arranged in time—of being *serial*, in a word.

The interpolated brass and string chords open up several possible paths to pursue: The chords might be understood to exist on a separate plane¹⁸ such that they create a harmonic progression (see the two-staff system in example 2), perhaps adumbrating the two layers of harmony at the end of Vere’s final arioso (“I was lost on the infinite sea,” R.143); the way they rise and grow quieter can bring back to mind the music associated with an important verbal motive, “the mist,”

18. See Philip Rupprecht, “Tonal Stratification and Uncertainty in Britten’s Music,” *Journal of Music Theory*, 40 (1996): 311–46.

first heard at the beginning of act 2 (at R.2+8–13); perhaps the chords link forward to the next scene in some way (that the following scene was originally in the next act doesn't preclude a link because, again like *Wozzeck*, the music was intended by Britten to continue “across” intermissions)—the alternation of a¹ and k (i.e., I and V in F) leads directly into the introductory measures of “Billy in the Darbies,” a version of which served to close the original act 3 (as the pencil sketch shows) as well as to open act 4 (now act 2, scene 3); the recurrence of chord j, D major, might refer to the last note of the piece, the D that some writers feel “dissolves” the conflict between the keys of B♭ major and B minor, which has long been thought somehow to govern the work as a whole; the bass line of chords i, m, d—F♯, A♭, F♯—may have a remote connection to an important family of three-note harmonic/motivic cells throughout the opera. I consider some of these possibilities below, in this larger context.

The idea of “total serialism” was in the air at the time Britten was writing *Billy Budd* (1949–51), and he might have wanted to try his hand at it. In addition, the quasi-serial organization of the instrumentation after R.103, abstract patterns can be seen found from R.102 to R.103 that suggest he may have had something of the sort in mind. Though these patterns are not clear enough to establish precisely what that was without corroboration from Britten's sketches or statements, there are intriguing features that take us beyond the mere assertion that the distribution of chords among the various instrument families does not look random. For instance, the first nine chords are distributed as follows (T represents tutti; the horn chord is augmented with woodwinds):

$$\begin{array}{c} \longrightarrow \longleftarrow \\ \text{B (T) W S | H | (T) S W B} \\ \text{F-(x)-F-A-|C|-A-F-(x)-F} \end{array}$$

The symmetry around the central horn chord is, discounting the placement of the second tutti, very reminiscent of the symmetry around C in Billy's motive, and even has the same number of “terms.” Though with less symmetry, the patterning continues to the end of the first half:

$$\begin{array}{c} \overbrace{\text{B H W H S (T) W S B}} \\ \underbrace{\hspace{1.5cm}} \end{array}$$

In view of serialism of a kind in the pitch structure and perhaps in the instrumentation, one turns expectantly to the dynamics, which do at first have a distinctly postwar look. The metric

reduction (ex.2), however, shows that the apparent “serial” dynamics are better described as “terraced” crescendos and decrescendos. In fact, in the pencil sketch, Britten indicated a crescendo or decrescendo on *each* chord; aside from the merger of successive hairpins of the same type in example 2, the dynamic markings in the sketch correspond very closely to what is shown here.

The first part of the interview scene, when metrically reduced, presents some other notable features. The loudest chords occur on the second beats of the first, second, and fourth hypermeasures (which may be why the tuttis are asymmetrical, if one accepts that there is symmetry); the last new chord also occurs on the second beat, as does the very last chord of the entire passage—one could make an argument for rebarring the reduction so that it starts with an upbeat. An implicit chromatic inner-voice line is shown in small notes, starting on C with a chromatic neighboring motion, then rising to E \flat and falling back to C, finally climbing chromatically to F on the last new chord. (Note that this chord is preceded by chord g, which was also the second chord of the series; in other words, the series begins with a⁵ moving to g (F major–A major) and ends with g moving to a¹. One might say that this makes a kind of semiotic reference to the major 3rd of Billy’s fanfare, but without any prolongation by voice-leading.) The last two staves of example 2 show how two other aspects of the passage, motivic organization and register, suggest other hypermetric interpretations that do not, however, necessarily contradict the primary interpretation: Britten may well have wanted to create such a multilayered hypermeter precisely because of the inherent metrical dullness of a series of whole notes.

It seems unlikely to be a coincidence that the number of chords in the first half of the passage, eighteen, is the same as the number of major and minor chords that harmonize the tones of the F major triad; this equality may explain why there are *thirty-four* chords—it is eighteen chords twice, with two overlaps, in the middle and with the first bar of the next scene. In a sense, the four chords (m, k, e, g) repeated in the first half *replace* the four chords not used. The repetition, once it is seen as unavoidable, can be rationalized as a kind of transition to the repetitiveness of the second half, as when Bartók alternates bits of a preceding passage with the beginning of a new one. In any case, there is a quasi-serial compensation for the “violation” of strict procedure: Except for chord e, the reused chords are presented in retrograde order (see the boldface letters in example 1b; the exception, chord e, is a member of a pair of chords, i–e,

whose meaning will become clearer as we proceed). Furthermore, while single chords are repeated, no pairs of chords are repeated until after R.103. The desire for harmonic contrast that characterizes the passage might well account for the elimination of a^3 (yet another F major chord) and for the fruitful repetition of g (A major) rather than using, say, h^1 (A minor). Beyond that, it seems necessary to consider the dramatic associations of the chords used. We must therefore look at the passages later in the opera where the series is referred to and at earlier passages that the interview may be refer back to; the lack of motivic activity makes retrospective references seem unlikely, but it is even more unlikely that a composer like Britten, with strong connections to tradition, would have composed the interview to be something entirely unrelated to the rest of the opera. It is also noteworthy that after the interview, the sequence never recurs exactly; certain of its members, as well as certain pairs of chords and one or two triples are invoked, however, surely with some significance.

Britten cannot use all twelve tones in the interview because there is no major or minor triad harmonizing F, A, or C that contains B, but the several instances of the self-complementary hexachord 014589 as the source of two or three successive triads in the interview (see ex.6d, below) connects to other parts of the opera where the use of the total chromatic is an organizing principle of the harmony.

The serial organization of the interview proposed here, while admittedly loose and probably conditioned by other criteria (what one might expect, after all, from a composer like Britten), does suggest in and of itself an appropriate dramatic outline for the scene: in its first phase, a series of unconnected protests seized on in desperation, then responded to and overcome; in the quieting second phase (later echoed under Vere's words "infinite sea," R.143+1–2), over the gentle rocking of the ocean (a^1 – k), a growing acceptance in the face of inevitability.

Of the familiar kind of serialism, the partitioning of the chromatic universe and the ordering of pitch classes, however, we have as yet seen nothing—and of "tone rows" there is nothing to be seen. But there is in *Billy Budd* a fundamental division of the total chromatic into hexachords. This is intimated from the first sound we hear, even before the full primary hexachord, which is self-complementary at T_2 , emerges. The hexachord is used precompositionally as a source of motives, at times as a source set (often juxtaposed with its complement) for foreground pitches, or as an organizing principle for the referential sonorities of adjacent large sections, among other

things. To the major ramifications of this basic harmonic structure, the rest of this essay will be devoted.

CROSS-RELATED TRIADS: SURFACE DISJUNCTION AND NONTONAL UNITY

In the wake of Arnold Whittall's article, there has been a temptation to find significance in the use of common-tone connections between the chords of the interview (even though Whittall rightly emphasizes the disjunctive quality of the sequence).¹⁹ Riemannian theory is, however, descriptive in much the same way as the taxonomic approach that has thus far been taken here and tells us no more (maybe even less). In fact, it may grant a theoretical "unity" to the passage—"saving it" for F major, one might say—that goes against the actual effect of the music. More important, Whittall's approach was part of a welcome change of course in the study of the opera, and the defenders of "faith" as ultimately triumphant in the opera have themselves been on the defensive ever since.²⁰ Any description of constructive principles—whether based on chord function or serial organization, or even "undecidability," if interesting and of some explanatory value—cannot by itself address the issue of what function the music serves in the theatrical experience of an opera; to be bald about it, What does the music *say*? From that perspective, we can again address *how* the music says what it says, which in the best outcome gives us in turn a deeper understanding of what it says. The descriptive protocols are ultimately only as good as how much they improve our understanding and add to our experience of the opera.

The first impression the interview gives, as I said, is one of disjunction. The presence or absence of common tones is therefore less important than other factors: In the move from F to A major, and from A to D \flat major, there is in each a common tone (A and C \sharp /D \flat , respectively), but what Britten heightens with his registral dispositions are the cross-relations, C \natural –C \sharp and A \natural –A \flat . He also emphasizes in both cases the implicit redefinition of a diminished 4th as a major 3rd (A–D \flat as A–C \sharp and C \sharp –F as D \flat –F). The move from D \flat to C major has no common tones, but again what are most present to the ear are the diminished 4th from A \flat down to E \natural and the augmented

19. Whittall, 156ff.

20. The ending never has felt upbeat, so I have composed a new ending for the diehards. See appendix 4.

2nd D \flat –E \natural , which reinforce the sense of disjunction. Note that the sense of F major-minor underlies these perceptions; pure disjunction, even if it were possible in music, would quickly baffle the listener. What is wanted is an effect of being off balance, confused and lost, though not utterly (*confusion* and *lost* are of course key words in Vere’s lexicon). I will presently attempt to account for these harmonic disjunctions under the rubric of the trichord 014, with which the opera opens so memorably.²¹

The next move, from C major to D minor, which is perfectly diatonic, surprises us, even though the cross-relations with the preceding D \flat major have been softened by the intervening C chord. Another element contributes to the surprise: The first five bars of the interview sequence are quite reminiscent of the first seven bars of Vere’s aria “I accept their verdict,” which end on a D minor chord with F on top setting the word “death” (see ex.3). The D minor chord in the interview sequence retains some of the shock the earlier one caused as a sudden, almost hysterical, \natural VI in an F *minor* context (the sustained horns with a similar voicing help make the connection, as well). So the interview chords, while without motives on the surface, as Philip Rupprecht and other have tellingly discussed, are evidently not entirely without connection to what has come before.²² Their deeper relationship to the harmonic organization of the opera as a

21. Though I do not use Forte numbers, I will use pc set nomenclature in three ways; the differences between them will usually be clear from the context. When there is a possibility of confusion, I will give a set in two forms. First, I will refer to abstract forms, such as the 014 trichord; unlike most theorists, however, I usually distinguish between a set and its inversion, as in 014 and 034. Second, I will refer to several specific pitches (C = 0), but in normal order, giving the abstract set in parentheses: 236 (014). Third, occasionally, I will refer to pitches, not in normal order, but in the traditional order, lowest to highest. In these instances, there will often be regular musical notation as well because the pc numbers in these cases have reached the limit of their usefulness (which is their very abstraction). I also use T and E for 10 and 11.

22. The first three chords of the interview were in fact heard (in a different order but bracketed by instrumentation, tempo, and gesture) in act 1, at R.55 –4, when Claggart warns Billy to take care of his appearance—the bass line composes out 014: C \sharp , C \natural , C \sharp , E (the A in the vocal score is an error for C \natural).

Rupprecht, in *Britten’s Musical Language*, uses the term *slide*, after David Lewin, to describe a harmonic move from a major to a minor triad, or vice versa, where the triads share the same pitch as 3rd;

whole will emerge through analysis of several earlier scenes. Moreover, though their striking later recurrences have been widely noted, I will show that the influence of the sequence on the denouement of the opera is more pervasive than has been previously understood.

The importance of disjunction in the interview is suggestive in a more general sense: One of the features of the dramatic structure of the opera that has been commented on, sometimes unfavorably, is the interruption of Claggart's accusation of Billy by the sighting and subsequent attempted chase of the French ship. But it seems possible that consciously or not, the librettists, E. M. Forster and Eric Crozier (working very closely with Britten), adopted this narrative strategy *thematically*, in reference to Billy's stammer. There are several other instances of narrative digression, and more to the present point, Britten adopts a similar compositional strategy in a number of ways. I therefore make attention to compositional analogs of narrative digression a touchstone in what follows.

The Limits of Tonality: Act 1, Scene 1, and Act 2, Scene 3

Elsewhere, I have shown the importance of certain pitches in *Wozzeck*,²³ and again, I think *Billy Budd* follows that model, both by identifying specific pitches with specific characters and also in terms of specific transpositions of harmonic structures, which have usually been described—in my view, misleadingly—as key relationships. One must always be very cautious, however, in arguing from obvious surface features to less obvious structural ones, much the way the simple

for him, the slide is a kind of motive connected with Claggart, which is later transferred to Vere. For instance, he notes (p.131; also see his ex.3.18, p.134) that Vere's "I accept their verdict" slides from F minor at R.97 to E major (R.97+12)—I must say that the intervening harmonic motion makes for a rather *bumpy* "slide," but only to quibble with aptness of the term itself. In seeking to establish connections of the interview with the rest of the opera, Rupprecht then suggests that this slide is answered by the motion F# minor to F major in the interview (R.103+6–7). To my ears, however, the two "planes" (Rupprecht's term in "Tonal Stratification," cited in n.18, above) of the interview music—the alternation of a¹–k and what I call the interpolated chords—are separate enough by this point that the sense of progression instead carries over from F# minor to the A♭ major (R.103+8); see my examples 2, 6a, and 6c.

23. "Voice Leading as Drama in *Wozzeck*," in *Schenker Studies 2* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 160–91 (also available online).

identification of a pc set on the surface does not guarantee its significance. The essence of Schenker's thought in this regard is not that there are long-range connections but that they must be *composed out*.

There is no question that Britten used triads and keys symbolically—the isolated trombone chord in act 2, scene 3, at Billy's mention of Claggart's fate (R.113+1), is noticeable and memorable (even if it is a G minor triad, not F minor, a key widely associated with Claggart)—but this kind of analysis, like any other, can get almost comically overdetermined in the hands of some practitioners. It begs several questions, the most basic being whether a triad by itself is sufficient to act as a symbol. Self-evidently, it is not, because an F minor triad, if arpeggiated on the piccolo, would do little to remind even the listener with perfect pitch of Claggart.²⁴ The triad that follows the G minor two bars later, again on the word “fate”—now in connection with Vere's responsibility for Billy's impending execution—which this time *is* an F minor triad, though played by muted trumpets and the woodwinds, has been taken to represent how Vere is now the agent of Billy's destruction, having assumed Claggart's role.

Several commentators on the opera have noticed suggestions of such a transfer of responsibility—or as Rupprecht calls it, following Greimas, the merger of Claggart and Vere into a single *actant*²⁵—in various passages, but it strikes me as odd in this particular place: Billy is still at this point struggling to understand his relationship to Vere, yet it is clear to him that he had to kill Claggart. To take the orchestra's F minor chord as linking Vere to Claggart calls for an ironic stance that is foreign to Billy's character and would amount to undercutting him if the irony is imputed to a disembodied narrative voice. That in turn brings up another objection, for the narrative voice is not disembodied at all: Vere is the opera's narrator, and he would be the last to connect himself to Claggart. In the Melville original, Vere's thoughts, words, and actions all seem intended to shield himself from personal responsibility for Billy's death yet are what bring it about. Rupprecht argues, following Peter Evans, that in the opera, Vere as an old man (the narrator) possesses the self-awareness to recognize that responsibility.²⁶ This view of Vere

24. Then again, maybe of *Squeak*, and *thus* of Clag— Oh, never mind.

25. Mitchell, in the Cambridge Opera Handbook, 113; Rupprecht, *Britten's Musical Language*, 123.

26. Rupprecht, 123.

is difficult, however, to reconcile with his portrayal in the Epilogue, where he seems rather unthinkingly to accept his salvation by Billy between bouts of regret—indeed, his acceptance seems motivated by a wish to drive self-knowledge out of consciousness (note the sequence: “I could have saved him . . . What have I done? . . . But he has saved me”). If the aim is to portray him as having self-knowledge, it seems an odd decision to do so in a place where he is hidden “behind” the narrative, but *not* to do so when he is before us in his own person. His lack of self-knowledge is precisely what has allowed some commentators to wrongly take his salvation at face value, much as he does himself.²⁷

Returning to the consideration of chords and keys: Some analysts seem not to attend sufficiently to the way a chord is referred to or its context. While many writers have found the closing bars in B \flat major to retain traces of B minor, one recent article claims, on the contrary, that the closing bars are “haunted by F minor” (presumably meaning the presence of the pitches F, A \flat , and C in Vere’s line).²⁸ But the haunting could hardly be by the ghosts of both B minor and F minor! The final bars are without doubt “haunted,” but sensing the presence of B minor—and especially F minor—must come of *looking* at the music rather than *listening* to it.

It has been taken as self-evident that the conflict between B \flat and B \natural at the beginning and throughout the opera arises from the joint presence of B \flat major and B minor in the Prologue. Played by itself, however, the high string line (the presumable B minor) is hard to hear as anything other than a modally inflected G major—inflected as a matter of fact in much the same way as the line that everyone agrees is in B \flat major, with a lowered $\hat{7}$. (See ex.4; note also the

27. In one other passage, Rupprecht’s identification of Vere with Claggart seems an out and out misreading: he asserts that Vere appears for the first time in the Prologue with Claggart’s descending-4th motive in the orchestra. According to the stage directions, however, Vere has been visible for six bars—almost thirty seconds—before the motive is heard. A better understanding of the timing of the appearance of the motive is that it represents the return of the story to Vere’s consciousness, for it seems to be what occasions his beginning to tell it—Claggart’s descending 4ths are also part of a displaced rising 3rd and so can be thought to represent Billy. Moreover, the setting of Vere’s first words are musically connected to it; see examples 13a and 15a, below. (Note that the motive also completes the chromatic.)

28. Stephen Arthur Allen, “*Billy Budd: Temporary Salvation and the Faustian Pact*,” *Journal of Musicological Research*, 23 (2006): 43–73.

feints at canonic imitation between the voices. The entire Prologue is sketched in example 13a, below.)

At least as disputable is the idea that the first “O heave” chorus (act 1, R.5) is in B minor.²⁹ This reading must rely in some measure on taking the significance of B minor as a given. B major does sound like a point of arrival at R.4+9, but the immediate “slide” to C minor dissipates the influence of B over succeeding local events. Moreover, while B major is the governing tonality until the stasis on B \flat at R.10, in the foreground the first “O heave” chorus does not prolong B minor since C \sharp is the head tone of the melody and D and B its neighbor notes (see ex.5a). This is a difficult point: The D in the bass is an upper 3rd of B in the background and could be understood to stand for a first inversion B minor chord (although the D functions as a C \times in the chromatic filling of the motion from B to D \sharp in the bass), but the foreground sonority is a “consonant” D major 7th chord.³⁰ To read the first “O heave” chorus in B minor is akin to

29. Mervyn Cooke, “Britten’s ‘Prophetic Song’: Tonal Symbolism in *Billy Budd*,” in the Cambridge Opera Handbook, pp. 85–110. Cooke’s chart (p. 89), which gets quite a lot right, in my opinion, implies that key symbolism *explains* something. His hints about motivic relationships are all to the good because they deal with the actual music as it composes out the relationships, but this doesn’t overcome the unfortunate tendency (not by any means Cooke’s alone) to treat keys as Platonic forms, as if any music in F major followed by any other music in B \flat major at any distance and with any intervening events has a fixed and specifiable semantic value. Indeed, it is questionable whether it has any meaning at all (aside from a possible private meaning for the composer). It may be analogous to the vexed philosophical issue of “truth value” in that it can really only *affirm*. Formally, “*It is true that 2 + 2 = 4*” and “*It is true that 2 + 2 = 5*” are identical. In the same way, V–I can say “yes” to both “Vere achieves salvation” and “Vere is left in confusion on the infinite sea.”

30. The expectation ought to be that structural levels are logically consistent with one another. If event Z prolongs event Y on one level, then Y cannot prolong Z on another level (though Y can be prolonging event X on a deeper structural level). Sometimes, however, the nature of a prolongation can change between levels; for example, what appears to be a neighbor note on one level may turn out to be a passing tone on a deeper level.



To insist that the note labeled in the example above really is one or the other is to falsely reify the structure, which, it must be borne in mind, is a metaphor for a cognitive process applied to an experience.

hearing the first chord of the Brahms D minor piano concerto as a functional $B\flat_3^6$ chord—the voicing of the chord in the vocal score might make B minor appear more convincing, but in the orchestra—perhaps because of the overtones of the low contrabassoon D—it sounds more like what is shown in example 5a. Moreover, Vere’s cry of “What have I done?” in the Prologue (R.3+2–6) is very similar intervallically to the first “O heave” chorus; Vere’s lament *does* sound like B minor, but since the lament is a 4th higher, one ought to hear “O heave” in F# minor—as one would in the absence of explicit harmony. The second “O heave” (R.7+2) is unambiguously harmonized by D# minor and because the melody is a major 3rd higher than in the first, this might seem to support the reading of B minor in the first chorus. But the melody is also present at its original level, in canon. A more inclusive view of the whole passage shows a large-scale boundary play in B major in the bass (see ex.5b).

This means that the possibility of a shift of interpretation from one level to another is not the result of ambiguity. That it can seem to be ambiguous comes of using the spatial metaphor *structure* for an experience, which is temporal. Real physical structures don’t allow for ambiguity (no one would want to drive over an ambiguously engineered bridge), so the idea of ambiguity doesn’t gibe with the concept of a musical structure. But there are in fact two steps involved in each act of musical judgment: (1) assigning a hierarchical position to an event, and (2) interpreting the nature of the event. In most cases the first step so obviates the second that the second seems to disappear.

To make this difficult point in another way (also difficult), I ask the reader to consider this excerpt from late notes by Wittgenstein, published as *On Certainty*, ed. and trans. G.E.M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright (London: Blackwell, 1969):

27.4 [1951] . . . 675. If someone believes that he has flown from America to England in the last few days, then, I believe, he cannot be making a *mistake*.

And just the same if someone says that he is at this moment sitting at a table and writing.

676. “But even if in such cases I can’t be mistaken, isn’t it possible that I am drugged?” If I am and if the drug has taken away my consciousness, then I am not now really talking and thinking. I cannot seriously suppose that I am at this moment dreaming. Someone who, dreaming, says “I am dreaming”, even if he speaks audibly in doing so, is no more right than if he said in his dream “it is raining”, while it was in fact raining. Even if his dream were actually connected with the noise of the rain.

In *Billy Budd*, as in almost every through-composed opera, numbers remain the structural units, though they usually begin or end in elision, or are broken up.³¹ The first “number” of scene 1 starts at R.4 and ends at R.15, and comprises the “O heave” choruses, which serve (as the voice-leading sketch shows) as structural pillars of the passage; around these pillars, brief dramatic “blackouts” occur in accompanied recitative, featuring tattoos of repeated sixteenth notes. This organization holds from R.4 to R.10; then the contrapuntal structure becomes quite static, and remains so through R.12. At R.13, the sixteenth notes reappear—in various registers, as at R.4—to introduce the climactic “O heave” chorus, which ends by restoring the B major that was established at R.4+9, then displaced by the B \flat of the static section.

The contrapuntal structure resembles tonal structures up to a point, especially in the deep middleground (take note of the “structural elaboration” at the end of the voice-leading sketch, ex.5b), and particularly in the avoidance of parallels as a motivation for diminution. Notice, however, that the parallel 5ths resulting from the rise of the D chord at R.5 to the D \sharp chord at R.7 are simply disguised by chromatic motions between voices rather than by more traditional contrapuntal procedures. Moreover, the resemblance to tonal music is limited by the structural treatment of 7ths and 9ths as “consonances” and the lack of harmonic unfolding in the background. In the course of this essay, we shall come to see that other, truly nontonal elements have at least as much to do with the contrapuntal structure as the procedures Britten inherited from tradition.

The stasis from R.10 to R.12 is organized dramatically around a run-in between the Novice and the Bosun that is interrupted by the swaying of the yardarm (R.11+7 to R.12 –3). I want to call attention to this as the first use of digression, one of the opera’s basic narrative strategies, later seen in act 2 in the interruption of Claggart’s accusation of Billy and in Vere’s two epiphanies, one before and one after the murder of Claggart. In light of the use of registral stratification in this scene and elsewhere, the harmonic distinction between the Novice, who sings in B major, and the Bosun, who sings in B \flat minor, is probably intended to be analogous to the social stratification of the ship, but it may also be a synchronic analog to the diachronic use

31. While in one sense retrogressive, the norm of numbers has long made possible such adventuresome theatrical effects as, for example, the portrayal of ironic simultaneity in the last scene of *Carmen*.

of dramatic and musical digression. The “bitonality” (at least in the notation) may be thought akin to the passage in the act 2, scene 3, ballad where Billy sings in F# minor accompanied by an F minor chord (see below, ex.6a). In act 1, scene 1, however, the static B♭ harmony overpowers all nonchord tones, just as the Novice is overpowered by the structure of shipboard authority.

Several points in the voice-leading sketch require comment. First, observe that the static B♭ at R.10 resolves a G♭ French augmented 6th chord in second inversion. Some of the same collection of pitches come back to prepare the final goal, B, in the form of a Phrygian II–V complex. Second, at least one of the parallel 9ths that underlie the voice leading from R.7 to R.9 is so displaced in the foreground that it may come under suspicion of being “theoretical” in the worst sense. Nonetheless, the passage can be heard in terms of the neater middleground shown in the example. That the 9th C♭ to D♭ (B to C#) is nowhere in the foreground may account for there being two *abbreviated* “O heave” choruses—one for each of the two pitches of the interval.

Example 5b looks reductive in the typical Schenkerian manner, with its elimination of surface voice leading and rhythm, but the passage is unusual in two respects that may not reveal themselves without such a reduction: First, the voice-leading is far less active than all the rhythmic activity on the surface suggests—indeed very little is reduced out of the sketch in the usual way. Second, in place of the historical norm of diminution, it is registral displacement that largely elaborates the basic voice-leading structure, with the very modern result that it is at times difficult to distinguish between inner and outer voices—further evidence that Britten’s music is less tonal than his ostensive materials lead many analysts to assume. The harmonic structure shown in the example is dispersed by register and by a freewheeling super- and subposition of the several lines, but at the start of the scene, Britten’s music briefly resembles Webern’s (in the Symphony, for example) in its assignment of the pitches of a basically static structure to distinct registers. When the first scene of act 1 is compared to the interview, where cross-relation and its correlative, register, play so marked a role—although the surface could hardly be more different—it is clear that the compositional technique is very much related.³²

32. That the librettists and composer wanted the set to mirror the social structure seems clear. See Mitchell in the Cambridge Opera Handbook (pp. 112 and 119–20). It might be of interest, if only to a limited extent, to press a connection between the three areas of the set and Emslie’s three thematic areas.

The prominent incomplete neighbor motion in the upper voice of the middleground (see the structural elaboration) may be thought to have a family resemblance to the “O heave” melody (see ex. 5a and 13e).

I should also mention a couple of instances of nonstandard notation introduced because of the character of the music: First, at R.9, the upper system features a beam in parenthesis. This indicates that owing to a very elaborate set of displacements between levels, a foreground passing tone, D \flat , is “deputized” as the representative of the actual middleground tone—note that Britten summarizes the vexed voice leading in the foreground immediately thereafter. Second, several note heads in the same system have the *laissez vibrer* notation (an open-ended tie), which here indicates that the pitch continues into the next harmony.

Finally, the analysis of the appoggiatura chord that resolves on B major at R.4+9 as a seven-pitch collection saturated with the trichord 014 (and its inversion, 034) does not in principle contradict its analysis as a combination of a pair of more conventional embellishing chords. It is noteworthy that one of these more traditional progressions involves the three chords, B \flat major, G major (dominant 7th), and B major, that figure as tonal centers at the beginning of the Prologue. Moreover, the aggregate of the three triads, another seven-pitch collection, 23567TE, includes the 014589 hexachord—previously mentioned in connection with example 1b—as 2367TE. This hexachord is built from overlapping 014 trichords (see the last staff of ex.6d), and I take it to be the basic harmonic element of the opera. I will usually refer to this seven-pitch collection as 0145(7)89 to emphasize that I consider the Prologue collection to be essentially 014589, much as an added-sixth chord in late-nineteenth-century music is functionally a triad. It has occurred to me that Britten once again follows Berg’s lead in introducing a nonsymmetrical element into his fundamentally symmetrical structures, as in the well-known “whole-tone-plus” chords of *Wozzeck*. With this particular hexachord, any foreign tone will of necessity be a semitone away from one of the semitone dyads, so the somewhat arbitrary designation (7) stands for all six possibilities.³³ The corresponding appoggiatura chord, 04678T, that resolves to B \flat at R.14 also combines two conventional progressions, but contains the minimum number of 014 trichords that

33. If we take B \flat as the tonic in the music’s mixed tonal and nontonal terms, and therefore the “origin,” or 0 in the mathematical terms of pitch-class sets, the extra pitch in the aggregate of the three triads, F, is 7.

any collection of six or more pitches that isn't either diatonic or whole-tone must contain (i.e., one). A subset of 0145(7)89, 014789, accounts for all of the drones accompanying "O heave."

One of the unfortunate misappropriations of Schenkerian ideas is the use of terms like "long-range goals" to apply when a connection of musical events is asserted (e.g., the F major of the interview scene as V to the B \flat major I of the Epilogue) *without* any attempt to show the voice leading that connects them. (One shouldn't be surprised that those who take tonality as an article of *faith* don't need to understand how it works.) This problematic tendency is made worse when the "key areas" that represent the supposed intermediate goals of motion have at best an ambiguous identity and often enough are patently misidentified. If the two string lines of the Prologue are in B \flat and G Mixolydian—so that B minor loses standing—the alternative of hearing the brass line in G \sharp minor rather than in B major (see ex.5d) undercuts B further. The functional difference is not all that great between the relatives, as the similarity of the voice-leading interpretations shows, but if one is hunting down potential key centers, it becomes essential to get the identification right.

While I hope it is clear by now, let me flatly state that my goal is not to substitute "correct" identifications of keys for the "incorrect" ones of other analysts; rather, my point is that the identity of the key in Britten's music is frequently too slippery to provide secure aim at more distant targets like background structure. (That's why the cannons on a "seventy-four" were mounted.)³⁴

THE 014589 HEXACHORD AS THE BASIC HARMONIC ELEMENT OF *BILLY BUDD*

This essay is intended to demonstrate that analysis ought to take a different tack, seeing Britten's music as often *triadic*, sometimes referring (one might even say parodying) tonal procedures, but seldom really *tonal*. Even in the set pieces of *Billy Budd*, for instance, any kind of conventional structural harmonic cadence is rare. (The foregoing example demonstrates that this does not preclude the possibility of voice-leading analysis.) The "tonic triads" are thus better thought of as

34. Britten's musical language lends itself to tonal ambiguity, but surely Mervyn Cooke in Cambridge Opera Handbook (p.108), misdescribes "O for the light" at R.50+7–9 as being in F minor (the melody originally began with $\hat{5}$, E, in A major at R.49+3; thus, starting on A \flat , it must be in D \flat major).

referential sonorities and not *keys*. This is of course in keeping with the treatment of the chords in the interview scene presented here, as musical objects arranged in time. Moreover, as the analysis of the “mist chords” will show (see ex.9a–c, below), major and minor triads should often be understood in this music to be subsumed in larger collections of pitches.³⁵ Even if a more or less tonal reading of a section of *Billy Budd* is viable in the foreground, in the context of the work as a whole, it may be more in tune with how the music works to think of coexisting tonal and nontonal principles. In fact, the analysis of the Prologue presented below (ex.13a) will dispense with any “keys” in favor of what I hope is a more nuanced approach.

Billy’s pseudo–folk ballad in act 2, scene 3, is a good example of the combination of tonal and nontonal procedures. It comes from the poem, “Billy in the Darbies [handcuffs],” that set in motion the composition of Melville’s original story, which started as an introductory note to the poem. The story grew so much that ultimately the poem was reduced to a coda. Britten’s setting exemplifies the technique of digression in the foreground, for Billy keeps pausing while the piccolo plays brief cadenzas based on the fanfare motive. Perhaps this is meant to suggest that he is half dozing, as he was when the ballad was introduced in fragmentary form in the last scene of act 1, or that his thoughts are wandering—well they might as he awaits execution. If one imagines the piccolo figures to be elaborations of the thirty-second-note figures that accompany

35. Another problem with key relationships in opera in general has always been that it is too easy. James Hepokoski, “Verdi’s Composition of *Otello*: The Act II Quartet,” in *Analyzing Opera: Verdi and Wagner*, Carolyn Abbate and Roger Parker, eds. (Berkeley, 1989), 125–49, examines an instance when a composer changed the key of a number to suit a singer. While a whole set of relationships is lost in the process, another one opens up. The cleverer you are, the more possibilities of relationships you can come up with, but the better a music analyst you would be, the more of them you must dismiss. Musical objects have almost no *inherent* significance. Like other objects of analysis, they are subject to a formula (offered with some, if not complete, seriousness),

$$\frac{A}{S} = R_A$$

where A is the object analyzed, S is its inherent significance, and R_A the number of relationships possible to other like objects. The number of relationships is inversely proportional to the significance: where S approaches 1, the number of relationships decreases, approaching what amounts to an identity, $A = R_A$; where S approaches 0 (as with A_{music}), R_A approaches infinity.

his stammering episodes earlier in the opera (act 1, R.27 and R.94; act 2, R.69), it is possible to hear the ballad as embodying as a kind of slow-motion stammer.

Formally, the ballad has three “verses,” ABA'. Despite the contrasting nature of the middle verse, there is a “refrain” within all three, the musical equivalent of the sort of “Hey nonny” phrase that repeats in the words of traditional ballads. Both A verses conclude with a “chorus.” The alternation of F and C in the bass carries over from the alternation of a¹–k in the interview; aside from a couple of passing tones, they are the *only* bass tones in the ballad, irrespective of the harmonies above them—even when those harmonies are I and V: Referring to example 6a, a voice-leading sketch of the ballad, observe how the bass falls out of sync with the implicit harmonies of the vocal line at Billy’s thought of dawn, when he is to be executed. (This may be thought to anticipate the strangeness of the interview chords when they recur in the Epilogue.) The surface modulations are also influenced by the interview chords: While any piece in F might well feature some of the same local tonicizations, the presence of F# minor (vocal part at R.105+3–6) specifically recalls the interview, as do several unusual successions of harmonies.

The F# minor occurs in the B verse, where the refrain, Billy’s vocal phrase “Heaven knows who will have the running of me up”—that is, who will pull on the other end of the rope that will hang him—is notated in that key, though accompanied by an ostensible F minor chord within a tonicization of D \flat major. Britten evidently wanted attention paid to the line because besides using the rather strange “bitonal” notation he marks it with an injunction to the singer, “words!” The voice-leading sketch of the ballad features, among other things, the manifest recurrence of chords from the interview: a–k, naturally, and d–h. While the second pair are not identical to any pair of chords in the interview, they derive from the same six-pitch collection, 014589, as a–g–d, the first three whole-note chords,³⁶ and they are of the same type as j–f and i–e (see the brackets above the staff in ex.1b). The two chords are heard simultaneously later in the scene (R.111) when Billy refers to “that cursèd mist” (which prevented an engagement with the French ship); note that the dotted rhythm of the accompaniment recalls the rhythms of the opening of act 2,

36. 590 (F major) + 914 (A) + 158 (D \flat) = 014589 = 158 (d) + 904 (h).

scene 1, where similar chords first occur (see ex.6b).³⁷ In the B section of the ballad, this pair of what we will come to call “mist chords,” D \flat major followed by A minor (R.105+5–6), accompany the line, “No pipe to those halyards,” heard after the one in F \sharp minor.

In addition to having all the same pitches as the first three chords of the interview scene, that is, a–g–d, the roots of the triads, D \flat and A, create in the F major context of the ballad the same equal division of the octave (by major 3rds). After the diatonicism up to this point, the chromaticism of the abrupt move from D \flat major to A minor is like an abyss opening up beneath one’s feet, suggesting Billy’s thought of what awaits him. Moreover, the tonicization of D \flat shown in example 6a involves the same pitches as the second, third, and fourth of the interpolated chords in the interview scene, the F \sharp minor and A \flat major chords now combined over an F pedal to create what looks like the F-minor chord with the refrain in F \sharp minor (see ex.6c); the D \flat major chord that completes the progression is in first inversion in both the interview and the ballad. The F pedal also recalls the oscillation (a¹–k) into which those chords were interpolated. We saw similar instances of superimposed embellishing chords in the first scene of act 1 (ex. 5b and 5c). What might have looked far-fetched in example 2—treating the interpolated chords as a harmonic progression—no longer seems so.

One could draw a jocular connection between the mist and the obscurity of the line “No pipes to those halyards,” but the words do in fact make quite a serious (if ironic) connection between the activities on deck in act 1, scene 1, when the sailors sang “O heave” (cleaning the deck with holystones, i.e., pumice, and “swaying” a yardarm to reorient the sails) and the method of Billy’s execution. “Halyards” are the ropes used to maneuver the sails as well as to “run him up.” As we have heard in the earlier scene, sailors are summoned to man the halyards by the sound of a pipe, *except* (as we will hear soon thereafter) at an execution, when drums instead are used—thus, “No *pipe* to *those* halyards.” The line “A blur’s in my eyes” also reinforces a connection with the mist motif.

37. The ballad’s unusual minor dominant in a major key may have been inspired by a similar passage in *Das Lied von der Erde*, in the last movement, at R.13, where the local tonic is also F major and the accompaniment has a similar “rocking” figuration.

The chords D \flat major and A minor make a pair, one of three possible, each comprising a major triad and a minor triad whose root is four semitones lower, that can be derived from a given transposition of the hexachord 014589 (which in this case is at T $_0$, C, D \flat , E, F, A \flat , A \sharp); the other two pairs with the same pitches are A major and F minor, and F major and D \flat minor. The importance of 014589—built, as I said, from overlapping 014 trichords—and other related collections will be developed throughout the remainder of this essay, particularly with reference to the major–minor pairs just introduced. Example 6d summarizes a number of the hexachord’s ramifications, some of which I will not discuss until later. Billy’s reference to the mist in connection with one of those major–minor pairs is thus foreground detail that links to the largest structural elements.

Billy’s ballad continues to structure much of the rest of the scene even though it seems at first to trail off without any melodic descent (he is probably drifting back to sleep, dreaming again of the “oozy weeds” that drag him down). The gestures and figuration of the ballad will be recalled a few times, but with Dansker’s entrance the foreground texture becomes freer—accompanied recitative, with short ariettalike “inserts” (to borrow a film term). The harmonic structure also shifts. Dansker “steals in” with some grog, his first line, “Here, Baby,” materializing out of the alternating low A–C of the ballad’s accompaniment. Billy’s answer begins as an abbreviated recap of the B section of the ballad, but Dansker picks up on Billy’s word “trouble,” and his lines “All’s trouble. / The whole ship’s trouble / and upside down” oddly echo the beginning of the ballad (see the brackets on the small staff above the first system of ex. 7a, which is a continuation of ex. 6a, the voice-leading sketch of the ballad). He reports that there is talk among the crew of rescuing Billy (tantamount to mutiny), and the passage builds up sequentially to the point where Billy implores Dansker to tell his shipmates not to get in the same trouble he’s in.

The sequential passage begins almost tonally and maintains a tonal aspect throughout, but as example 7a shows, it is based on the 014589 hexachord and its self-complementary structure: first TE23[67], then its complement 4589[01] provide the framework in the bass. If we take those two collections as the harmonies, then it is noteworthy that the first, TE236, lacks the pitch G (7), which is added to the second, 0145(7)89—in other words, the hexachord is at the interval transposition, but its symmetry is undone, in the manner of the Prologue collection.

The successive steps of the sequence are linked in various nontonal ways: by complementation, by inversive complementation, and by presenting salient subsets that make up a larger intersecting set, for, with the resolution on B \flat major, a third transposition of the basic hexachord, 12569T (T₁), encompasses the last two harmonies. This transposition is the source of the two interview triads, i–e, F \sharp minor and B \flat major that are unfolded in the bass for much of the remainder of the scene.

The “exploded” three-staff voice-leading sketch below the main system of example 7a tracks the five initial pitches of the passage as they vacillate by semitone, finally settling on the members of the hexachord. This is very reminiscent of the voice leading in the last scene of *Wozzeck*.³⁸ It is becoming evident that Britten’s music shows a variety of nontonal procedures characteristic of what is called “free atonality,” but despite the frequent resemblance to Berg, I want explicitly to eschew such a term as “proto-serial,” because it is falsely teleological in Berg’s case and obviously anachronistic for Britten.

After the sequential passage, Billy sings, at R.110, the last line that sounds like a literal continuation of the ballad, “Done me a lot of good— / a drink, and seeing a friend.” The harmony is no longer a simple F major, however, but the 0145(7)89 Prologue collection (again at the interview transposition). The line, which starts as another continuation of the rising 4th motive that ended the ballad (refer back to ex.6a), again trails off, now with three references to the verdict motive (“hanging from the yardarm,” at R.95 –3) filling in the major-3rd gaps of the 014589 hexachord, two in the vocal line, one in the bass.

Continuing with the last system on the page of example 7a, Billy then asks what the weather is to be in the morning, and there follows the passage, mentioned earlier, that recalls the mist (ex.6c). The 0145(7)89 accompaniment rises up to f³ in the flute, whereupon the high register is left hanging. A short passage in 3rds (based on the rising 4th motive of the ballad) follows; once again it is harmonically based on hexachordal complementation while retaining tonal features, moving in contrary motion from the middle register as Billy tells Dansker he had better leave. When the accompaniment again reaches the high register, the flute *continues* the verdict motive, e³, d³, d \sharp ³, c \sharp ³, as Billy mentions the chaplain’s visit—a fine musical image of how conventional

38. See my article (cited in n.23, above), p.182 (p.21 of the online version).

religion seeks to cover up the cruelty of the system, for the motive is just hidden enough to give one the feeling of a reference to Billy's impending fate without seeming to be literally there.³⁹ Notice how readily the voice-leading governed by dyads of the hexachord lends itself to the formation of "pivot chords" (D \flat major 7th and G dominant 7th) that lead to the V–I resolution on A major (a triad derivable from the interval transposition of 014589).

As it proceeds, the scene comes to be completely governed harmonically by the 014589 hexachord and its self-complementation at T_{10} (and T_2 and T_6 —see ex.6d). The continuation of example 7a shows that though there are some triads, though the outer voices, particularly the bass, still function structurally, and though there continue to be prolongational levels akin to tonal music, the traditional tonality of key is absent. The low bass has moved from the F of the the ballad to the D \flat of the mist passage and to the A of the passage about the chaplain. A passage in quasi-imitative counterpoint (a kind of fugal stretto) outlines what strike the ear as successive parallel "minor 7th chords" (shown in the "four-part harmony" summary, example 7b; the small example above the first system of the continuation of ex.7a showing the motive—really two motives—on which the counterpoint is based should be studied first). These "minor 7th" sonorities are actually complete or incomplete 024679*i* collections, that is, two major triads a whole tone apart (0479 is the subset that can be described as a minor 7th chord).⁴⁰ As example 6d shows, this collection, from which a number of the opera's motives derive, is founded on the self-complementation of the 014589 hexachord. In the passage under discussion, the collection may initially be invoked by its inversion and complement, 023579, two minor chords a whole

39. Compare the reference to the Carmen/fate motive at the end of José's aria "La fleur que tu m'avais jetée": The mysterious pianissimo chords accompanying his penultimate note have often been assumed to refer to the motive, but why? It only makes sense if the first note of the motive is José's high B \flat and the top notes of the three nondiatonic chords and the final tonic are its continuation: B \flat , A, G (which strictly should be G \flat), A, F. The reference probably packs such a wallop precisely because it is semi-subliminal.

40. The letter *i* is added because I make a distinction between a set and its inversion, *pace* Allen Forte (and practically everyone else). The set that could be described as two minor triads a whole step apart shows up in Forte's list as 023579, an arrangement favored because of its compactness, i.e., the lowest placement of the smallest interval combined with the smallest interval for the set as a whole; "01357T" would place the smallest interval lower but at the cost of a larger encompassing interval.

step apart—in this case, the striking pairing of G minor and F minor on the repetition of the word “fate.”

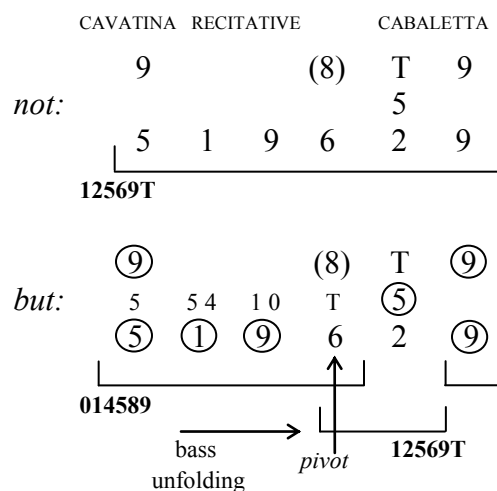
The minor 7th sonority highlights the parallel 10ths that support the upper-voice line, which turns out to be a large-scale hidden reference to the verdict motive, C, B, A, B \flat , G \sharp ! The four-part summary may look tendentious at first, but most of the alteration of voicing involves inner voices and is largely normative, if we accept one initial condition: the presence of A in the bass—i.e., below the D. This concession seems to me justified, given the use of the low bass (contra octave) to define broad static harmonic areas (again like Berg), first F (and C), then D \flat , then A. The next-to-last four-voice chord in example 7b is much less like the foreground because of the voice-leading complications, including double voice exchanges, that result from the quasi-fugal entrance of the “subject” on c², seven semitones higher than its first statement on f¹. This foreground complexity suggests that Britten might not have been conscious of the large-scale reference to the verdict motive—he might otherwise have tried to make it clearer. The deep middleground sketch (ex. 7c) shows that over the course of the extended recitative after the ballad and before the final arietta two hidden references to the verdict motive combine to fill in the 014589 hexachord from f³ down, F, E, C \sharp , C, A, G \sharp .

The low bass pitches of this passage, D \flat and A, move to F \sharp supporting the G \sharp of the upper voice. One expects F \natural instead, both to complete the equal division of the octave in the bass and to continue the parallel 10ths and the minor 7th chords. The pitches D \flat –A–F \sharp , however, arpeggiate the F \sharp minor triad, which is answered by its major-minor-pair partner, B \flat major (chords i–e, in the labeling devised for the interview), for Billy’s concluding visionary arietta of salvation. This passage is motivically linked to the ballad by its initial ascending 4th, B \flat to E \flat , followed by the cambiatalike motive (see the discussion of motives below in connection with ex. 13f).

The whole-tone motion up from G \sharp to B \flat in the voice seems to counteract the descending chromatic verdict motive, and G \sharp –B \flat may also recall to some ears the A \flat –B \flat motive of the Prologue. In both cases the G \sharp is a pitch foreign to 014589, though in relation to two different transpositions of the hexachord (T₁₀ in the Prologue and T₁ in Billy’s *scena*). Billy’s arietta culminates in the invocation of the interview chords that ends the scene. Remarkably, the long-deferred tonal upper-voice descent of the ballad can be heard in “Don’t matter now being

hanged”—after all that has intervened almost a throwaway line, but meaningfully set to the retrograde inversion of the verdict motive (ex.7d).

Example 7e encompasses the whole scene (which turns out to be, of all things, cavatina–[recitative]–cabaletta–[recitative]). It shows that the unfolding of the F# minor triad (169) in the bass (also shown in ex.7b and 7c) is more subtly understood as the product of two tones (19), common to 014589 and 12569T, in combination with the first pitch of the triad, F# (6), which appears in the bass at the pivot along with the last pitch of the former, G# (8). This background may appear to compose out 12569T because most of the pitches shown belong to that hexachord, but until the arrival of the F# in the bass, followed by D and B \flat in the outer voices, all the main tones are members of both hexachords, and the middleground unfoldings and the foreground clearly compose out 014589. The diagram below shows how the common tones can present a misleading picture when not distinguished from the tones exclusively in one hexachord or the other (the common tones are circled in the lower (“but”) part of the diagram).



The last recitative in Billy’s *scena* can be understood as an answer to the passage at the center of the ballad where he imagined the moment of his death with the sudden confrontation of interview chords d and h (D \flat major and A minor). At that point, 014589 was the source of his vocal line to the words “No pipe to those halyards— But ain’t it all a sham? A blur’s in my eyes; it is dreaming that I am” (see ex.6a). His thought of the parting cup, which followed, was surely intended (by Melville) in that existential context to allude to Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane.

In the final recitative (R.117–118), accompanied by the recall of the second half of the interview chords, all the vocal pitches are again members of the 014589 hexachord, with two important exceptions. Those two pitches are both approached by *whole step*—in this harmonic world of minor 2nds and minor 3rds, a potential sign of harmonic change. Given the self-complementation of the hexachord at the whole step, I would venture, *the* sign (e.g., the motion G♯–B♭ at the pivot from 014589 to 12569T, at R.115, in the background of the *scena*). The first non-014589 pitch in the vocal line is D, on the word “know” (R.117+3), which refers back to the bass D of the cabaletta, sustained for 31 measures and unresolved. (It is brought back twice more, at R.116 and R.117 –2, *still* unresolved!) The “sail” he has sighted is the source of the knowledge—the certainty—of his strength; harmonically, D recalls the inflection up to the transposition T₁. Then, at R.117+7, there is Billy’s assertion “I’ll stay strong,” with E♭ on the word *stay*, again approached by whole step. E♭ in this context—and with the words’ verbal allusion to what is to come—should be seen as referring ahead to the downward half-step transposition T₁₁ (E03478), the source of important pitches in the execution scene: for example, the reading of the verdict at R.130, 48E0, and the wordless chorus of protest, 8E34, then E347. Billy’s stammering trill—on C♯ throughout the opera—is also transposed down a half-step (R.132) as he is lifted into the air by “those halyards.” (The 5th E–A, which set those two words, is stunningly recalled in his last passage at the words “I’m contented.”)

In the final line of Billy’s scene, D once again occurs, in the setting of “*that’s* enough” (R.118 +3–4; an echo of “Es ist genug?”), the remarkably expressive suspension over F major the only *foreground* nonharmonic tone in the passage.

The diagram below summarizes the foregoing discussion; the circled pitches are those used in the vocal line of the passage. Note that the triads (underlined pitches), 269 (D major) and 803 (A♭ major), that support the two pitches not from T₀ are derived from the same transpositions.

$$\begin{array}{l}
 T_1: 1 \quad \underline{2} \quad 5 \quad \underline{6} \quad \underline{9} \quad T \quad \text{— looking back to the cabaletta’s vision: “I know it”} \\
 T_0: \quad \underline{0 \quad 1 \quad 4 \quad 5 \quad 8 \quad 9} \\
 T_{11}: E \quad \underline{0} \quad \underline{3} \quad 4 \quad 7 \quad \underline{8} \quad \text{— looking ahead to the execution: “I’ll stay strong”}
 \end{array}$$

That the interview—and what grows out of it, “Billy in the Darbies”—has antecedents in the opera is to be expected of what is in some sense the climax of the action. Again the influence of

Wozzeck is felt; Britten is perhaps even bolder, both in placing the interview “scene,” which is also an “orchestral interlude,” so far before the end (about twenty-five minutes) and in composing it so differently—Berg’s final orchestral interlude is a summation of many of the incidents of the opera by way of a fantasia on key leitmotifs; Britten’s is decidedly not. (We do get some flashbacks in the brief interlude between scenes 3 and 4.)

The first juxtaposition of major and minor triads four semitones apart derived from 014589 in fact occurs in the Prologue (R.2 –5–3; see below, ex.13a, p.2), but is far from obvious, because the triads, though in different registers, sound simultaneously and are prolonged by arpeggiation and by diminutions such as neighbor notes and the filling in of chordal intervals. Indeed, in the first act, these major–minor pairings are rare in the foreground, but they can be found on more remote structural levels. (Their emergence into the foreground would be a brilliant musical/dramatic strategy if it was planned, but it is equally possible that it resulted from Britten’s exploration of his materials as he wrote—especially since he apparently wrote the opera for the most part from beginning to end.) Examples 8a and 8b show two longer passages from act 1; some comments are in order.

Billy’s arietta celebrating his assignment to the foretop (R.31), is very different from the Prologue, for in this case the juxtaposed triads are structural harmonies (ex.8a). Note that after the music “modulates” from the initial E major to C minor, the same collection (E03478) that encompasses those two triads (48E and 037) continues to be the source of the main harmonies, though in the form of a *different* pair, C major and E major 7th (i.e., G# minor with E in the bass, 047 and (4)8E3). More traditional tonal structural harmonies, G major and B dominant 7th (III and V in E), seem curiously subordinate to the unfolding of the hexachord, although, as in so much of the opera, tonal and nontonal procedures operate together.

While harmonic progressions between chords that share no tones do occur in tonal music (they are usually stepwise root progressions), *structural* progressions are almost always between chords that share at least one common tone (root progressions by 5ths and 3rds). Conversely, while hexachord-based progressions sometimes use common tones, their most characteristic progressions are between collections that are mutually exclusive; the total contrast of set content can be understood as an audible source of movement in music in which root progression no longer holds. It seems quite possible that a hexachordal organization seemed instinctively right to

Britten because it expresses disjunction—even the major–minor pairs are mutually exclusive with respect to pcs—and this would have its most profound impact when the triad pairs are used structurally. The half-step movement of all three tones between triads guarantees a convincing sense of contrapuntal connection, but the complete contrast of pitch content assures that what is expressed is utter contrast of harmonic identity. In Billy’s arietta, this paints the glory of the foretop above versus the storms below; in the next example, Claggart’s aria (R.105), there is instead a psychological contrast (in keeping with his more complex personality) between the suppressed eroticism of “O beauty, o handsomeness” in A major and its repression into punishment of its object with the coda’s chilly F minor promise, “I, John Claggart . . . will destroy you.”

Claggart’s aria (sometimes loosely referred to as his “Credo,” after Britten’s model in Verdi’s *Otello*) uses the major–minor juxtaposition in at least two different ways. The background motion from A major to F minor ($914 + 580 = 014589$) is based on the hexachord at T_0 (though in the foreground this transposition is not featured until the last section). In the first A section, five of the six members of another transposition, 12569T (T_1), are prominent in the middleground—the pitches of the voice exchange that underlies the section (9T1 [014]), plus the unresolved neighbor tone of E ($\hat{5}$ in A major), F# (pc 6), and the structural neighbor of C#, D (pc 2)—and once the B section is reached (with the quicker tempo at R.107), this transposition emerges in the B section in various foreground major–minor juxtapositions. (A characteristic 014 trichord (67T) is also present in the first section in the boundary play of the upper voice; see ex.8b.)⁴¹ The hexachord 12569T is also initially and intermittently heard as a set of three

41. While some have thought the aria to be in “F# minor” because of the repeated 4th in the melody, F# down to C#, it would in any case be more accurate to refer to F# Phrygian, given the equally prominent G naturals. There are, however, no important F#s in the bass. Despite an association of F# with Claggart throughout the opera, A makes more sense as the tonic of the aria. The F#, as an unresolved neighbor note, is certainly salient enough, but it is perhaps for some listeners somewhat too subtle a musical image of frustration. This might account for Forster’s unhappiness with the aria: he complained of the lack of a sense of “sexual discharge gone evil.” (*Letters*, 618–20.) The motion between F# and C# does, if distantly, echo the climax of the “Liebestod” (transposed down a 5th), but maybe Forster was expecting something more *overtly* like *Tristan*.

interlocking perfect 4ths that constitute a kind of ritornello. It has to be acknowledged that determining which two triads are presented in the ascending vocal lines (“I will wipe you off the face of the earth,” etc.) is not easy because the 3rd is omitted from the second triad. Both the source hexachord and the relationship between the triads remain the same, however, whether they are B \flat major–F \sharp minor or D minor–F \sharp major. I have indicated the former in my example merely because that is how it usually sounds to me, based on an inner-voice motion, B \flat –A, that I infer to accompany the motivic D–C \sharp in 3rds,.

When the motive and the major–minor juxtaposition are sequentially transposed down a 5th ($T_1 - 7$) the resulting transposition of the hexachord is a half-step higher.⁴² With the 014589 hexachord, semitone transposition results in three common tones, here 26T—the D and the F \sharp have particular harmonic significance. A similar sequential transposition of the motive to C (in the measures leading up to R.108) leaves the major–minor pairs behind but initiates an expansion of the motive by grouping together short phrases derived from it.

The example continues to the end of the aria, but only a few additional details are germane to the present discussion. The major–minor juxtaposition is invoked twice more (both times derived from 12569T): first, as voice-leading chords within the progression based on the other important hexachord of the aria, 024679, at R.109 (which marks the return of C \sharp , spelled D \flat , to the upper voice and its arrival in the bass after being prolonged by the large-scale neighbor note D); and second, in the retransition to the initial material of the aria at R.110 (which marks the long-

The idea that the “Credo” is in F \sharp minor seems to mislead Shannon McKellar (see n.1, above) into the assertion that its peroration, “I, John Claggart . . . will destroy you,” is in that key! (p. 276); it must be either a typo or a memory slip. Though he perceptively and rightly connects this line to Vere’s parallel statement in the ten measures preceding R.100 in act 2, that also is not correctly labeled by him: while the tonality of Vere’s aria is F minor, “I, Edward Fairfax Vere . . .” is a local prolongation of B \flat minor (IV)—note especially the melodic repetition of $\hat{1}$ (i.e., $\hat{5}$ in B \flat), which parallels that of $\hat{5}$ at the start of the aria.

It must be stressed that my citation of others’ mistakes is not mainly for the gratification often referred to nowadays as “gotcha!” Rather, it is to show that to discuss Britten’s music—which can be very difficult to understand—as if all that is involved is the “easy” task of identifying keys (and incorrectly, at that) argues for a *deeper* approach to it.

42. $T_1 - 7 = T_6$; $T_1 + 1 = T_2$; but $T_6 = T_2$; therefore $T_1 - 7 = T_1 + 1$.

delayed resolution of the F# neighbor to E through a passing F \flat). It is worth underlining that in both instances foreground harmonic detail to which the listener has been sensitized—the major–minor juxtaposition—marks important background events, one of the ways in which nontonal and tonal elements are integrated in this music. If the F# in the melody at the start represents the unresolved eroticism of Claggart’s feelings toward Billy, its resolution to E represents his conscious *resolve* to destroy him. The root of the coda’s F minor, F \flat —which acted as a passing tone between the other two pitches—is, then, poetically a shadow of *both* notes: like F# an upper neighbor to E; like E a tone of resolution for F#. As such, it beautifully represents the sublimation of erotic attraction into a will to punish.

One additional unusual detail of this aria is the use of E \flat as a neighbor to D \flat /C# (which can be seen most clearly in the middleground sketch on page 3 of example 8b). I believe that E \flat represents the raised $\hat{4}$ in A major (i.e., D#) acting, in effect, as an intensified neighbor to the $\hat{3}$ because the natural $\hat{4}$, D, is made ambiguous by its use as the bass of a “consonant” major 7th chord that *supports* its tone of resolution, C#.

Before concluding this discussion of Claggart’s aria, I want to point out an intriguing connection between it and Billy’s arietta. The broad similarity of the harmonic plans of Billy’s short solo and Claggart’s longer one (and the differences naturally are equally important) might lend support to what is, once noticed, a more significant connection. The chord at the point where Billy’s rising line breaks off and the harmony veers downward from E major to C minor, B–A–C#–E–F# (pentatonic collection), is identical to the opening chord of Claggart’s aria. There, it is filtered, one might say, through the Master-at-Arms’s consciousness by being made (through the use of neighbor notes) to seem to allude to his motive in inverted form. (See ex.8c; note that in Billy’s arietta, in the passage immediately following the pentatonic chord, the same pitches, G and D, are the most salient pitches of his vocal line—though their voice-leading roles are different from the one they play in “O beauty.”) The rising line’s interruption corresponds to the words “up among the storms,” which we may suppose Billy views in a positive way—doing glorious battle with the forces of nature—but the harmonic shift suggests that Britten wanted us to be aware of danger. The music completes its rise to G# after the interruption, but its triumph is immediately undercut by the mistaken identification by the officers of Billy’s farewell to his old ship, *The Rights o’ Man*, as a revolutionary comment, reflected by the musical coincidence of his

line with the “O heave” chorus. Britten certainly intended a connection between this moment and the ascent to the G# that marks Billy’s death, which is followed by the wordless choral fugue based on the same “O heave” motive—in the same key and ultimately put down with the same unison Bbs from the officers. The moment of interruption (“storms”) in the ascent to G# is in effect expanded into Claggart’s assumption of the role of nemesis, and in this way, what Billy views as a triumphal ascent to the foretop is transformed into his fatal ascent to the yardarm.

I may be going out on a limb by suggesting that the importance of G# is adumbrated by its striking quality in the Prologue (spelled as Ab). Rupprecht is troubled by leitmotifs without clear verbal referents.⁴³ What can we say about a pitch that seems to claim our attention when a harmonic context has barely been established and not a word has been sung? How that pitch can be so “fateful” sounding is a question I shall return to in connection with an analysis of the Prologue.

In conclusion, I want to make note of four other instances of the major–minor juxtapositions I have been discussing: The large-scale confrontation of the Bb minor “mist” interlude and the D Lydian of Vere’s aria “Claggart, John Claggart, beware” (act 2, R.57) will be explored further in the next section (in connection with ex.9c and 9d). Two other instances where tonal contrast seems to be the main goal and two *keys* stand in the same relationship as the harmonies we have been discussing, are in act 1: at R.57, at the words “the French,” C major and G# minor, and similarly at R.66, Eb major and B minor, again in reference to the French. The former juxtaposition likely helps the latter to be noticed at all, for in the latter the Eb is the tonic of the duet “Don’t like the French,” which has a pandiatonic foreground style combined with much chromatic inflection; the harmony is, however, somewhat static (in a manner quite frequent in Britten’s music), and the B minor is literally sustained—with embellishing chords—for much of the succeeding thirty-two measures. Also not aurally obvious but far from requiring extensive analysis is the eruption of B major, at R.43 in act 2, into the G minor context, at Vere’s response to Claggart’s accusation that Billy is plotting mutiny, “Nay, you’re mistaken.” All of these instances use the sense of harmonic contrast between the triads to express, variously, either

43. See n.70, below.

Vere's opposition to Claggart's plot or the otherness of the French foe. (In the original story, there is a hint that Claggart may in fact *be* French.)

For antecedents of the interview in the opera, Rupprecht concentrates on the "chorale-like" textures heard throughout, although particularly in association with Claggart, because Rupprecht's essential idea about the interview is its almost complete lack of motives; he also catches references to the "mist" music, inasmuch as it is a "piling up of triads," if nothing more. To this group of chords, cognate with the verbal motive "the mist," is where we next turn our attention.

The Mist Chords: Act 2, Scenes 1 and 2

There are several versions of the mist chords. The first occurs immediately before Vere speaks the first line of act 2 (R.2+8–13; R.2+14–16), "I don't like the look of the mist, Mister Redburn"; it is shown in example 9a.⁴⁴ While the mist chords often take the form of a series of triads in *Billy Budd*, an understanding of these chords as derived from larger aggregates will reveal connections to harmonic structures that are not always presented on the surface as triads.

The initial harmonic motion in the first series of mist chords, then, is from B \flat major to C major, one major triad followed by another a whole step higher.⁴⁵ The opening measures of act 2 have composed out this idea, which is developed into the choral set piece "This is our moment" later in scene 1. The idea was introduced earlier, in the first scene of act 1 (R.15), in the fanfares that announce the arrival of the boat bringing the impressed men, including Billy Budd. As example 6d shows, it can be understood to be derived from the self-complementation of the hexachord 014589 at the interval of a whole step. The motion from the second chord to the next *new* chord (the B \flat returns as a passing chord) is C major–G \sharp minor, a major triad juxtaposed with a minor triad four semitones lower. This juxtaposition is, as we have seen, part of the "sound" of the opera as a whole (Verdi might have called it a *tinta*) and occurs both in the

44. The mist series are, however, adumbrated in bars R.1+6–7, in which 014589 (T₀) is composed out.

45. Either the B \flat or the C chord could be considered the first of the series. Gesturally, the B \flat triad is identical to the fanfarelike preceding measures, but hypermetrically, it is on the "downbeat" of the phrase encompassing the first mist series.

foreground and at deeper levels of structure, including a number of cases where the referential sonorities of successive large sections are two such triads.⁴⁶ It will now become a shorthand reference for the mist chords, as well as an expression of 014589.

The last motion connects G# minor to C minor, which adds no new pitches to the aggregate

Naturally, the four triads that rise into the upper register can be labeled with some of the same letters we have already used for the interview chords (at T_2 and T_{10}), but this is not especially remarkable: the thirteen different major and minor triads heard in the interview are more than half of the total number of twenty-four, so chances are better than even that the equivalence of labels could be a coincidence; in other words, one cannot prove compositional intention from it. What may be more worth noting is that one of the possible readings is at T_2 . Assuming we consider the interview to be “in F,” this reduces the plausibility of coincidence, given the G minor-major tonality in this scene. Of particular importance is that the first nine-pitch mist collection occurs *twice* in the interview, as chords m–j–f and k–i–e, with the same bass line (see the chords joined by beams below the staff in ex. 1b). But although some of the same labels apply in both examples 9a and 1b, the triples in the interview are not the mist chords transposed; *only the source collection is the same*. If we consider the transposition of the second triple, k–i–e, to be T_0 in the interview, then the transposition of the collection in the first mist sequence is T_2 (the corresponding relationship with the other triple is T_{10}).⁴⁷

46. I generally refer both to a series of piled-up triads and to the representative major–minor pairs as “mist chords” unless the context demands a distinction. In that case, I refer to the larger “mist collections” from which the chord series are derived.

47. The choice of a transposition to call T_0 is more in keeping with the structure of this essay than of the opera: Because the interview was my point of departure and the basis of the letter designations of chords, I often label other transpositions of triads in relation to it. Fortuitously, what I am calling T_0 is also the transposition where the abstract set description and pitch-class content coincide. In any case, the first mist collection does occur in *two* transpositions in the interview, and there seems to be no reason to favor one over the other. Besides, the concept of the tonic is essentially foreign to a musical universe of symmetrical hexachords, such as 014589. In a piece of music, however, contingency patently plays a greater role than in analysis.

The second sequence (ex.9b) follows immediately (R.2+18–20) and is freely varied with two somewhat fragmentary sequences (at R.3 –10 and R.3+15) that frame the appearance of Claggart. Vere's repeated comment about the mist after Claggart is announced can strike a listener as slightly obvious, as though the librettists were overanxious to make a point; Vere later calls Claggart's accusation of Billy a "foggy tale," as well. Some of the other features of these two examples will presently be explored further.

A table summarizing all the main mist sequences appears on the next page. For reasons that will soon become clear, the wide central column of the table highlights the *missing* pitches of the chords; the right column lists each collection untransposed. Given $C = 0$, the first mist collection, 234578TE0, is at T_2 with respect to its untransposed form. If not otherwise specified, each collection has nine pitches. Again, the letter *i* indicates that the actual chord in the music is an inversion of a more compact "normal order"; e.g., 01234789Ti is the inversion of 012346789. A brief examination of the patterns of omitted pitches should convince the reader that the sets are almost all different and that the succession of collections looks truly random. Repeated sets are for the most part at different transpositions; for example, the ten-pitch set at R.50+9 and R.51. The first instance is at T_{10} and the second is at T_2 . If there is any significance to the fact that these transpositions guarantee that the common pitches are 2367TE (014589), I am not aware of it. Only the set at R.34+3 is repeated with the same pcs (in somewhat different order but subdivided into the same triads). That set is the inversion of the set at R.2+18, which, like the set at R.34+3, is heard after the words "the mist" are sung; the set at R.50 then begins the orchestral interlude. The constantly shifting sets seem to portray the mist's ever-changing yet paradoxically changeless character. The second collection does not contain 014589; the third collection contains the hexachord only if one counts the inner-voice $D\sharp$ (and consequently reckons it as a ten-pitch collection). The first collection with ten pitches in the unfolding triads, the one beginning at R.3+15, initially has only eight pitches (until R.4 –7); these eight pitches happen to be a subset of the initial mist collection, though at a different transposition:

0 1 2 3 5 6 8 9 T (R.2+8)
8: 0 1 2 4 5 7 8 9 (R.3+15)

R. 2+7(8)	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	T	E	01235689Ti
2+18	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	T	E	01234789Ti
3-10	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	T	E	01234579Ti
3+15	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	T	E	10:012345789T
31	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	T	E	01234689Ti
32	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	T	E	
34	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	T	E	
34+3	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	T	E	012346789
48	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	T	E	01234678T
50	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	T	E	012346789
50+4	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	T	E	8:0123569Ti
50+9	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	T	E	10:012345689T (T ₁₀)
50+14	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	T	E	8:01245689
50+20	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	T	E	01234589Ti
51-5	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	T	E	10:012345678T
51	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	T	E	10:012345689T (T ₂)
51+4	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	T	E	10:0123456789
52	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	T	E	11:0123456789T ← arpeggiation reverses direction
54	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	T	E	11:
54+4	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	T	E	11:
54+8	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	T	E	8:0123459Ti

THE “MIST” CHORD COLLECTIONS

Although the first three triads used cannot be paired in the familiar way, major and minor, four semitones apart, the eight pitches, *taken as a collection*, contain 014589 at T₁, and therefore, potentially, three such pairs of triads. Naturally, the two pitches of the first eight presented *not* in that transposition of 014589 and then—after Vere again comments on the mist—the remaining two that complete the ten-pitch collection plus the prominent A^b in the vocal line make up five of the six pitches of the complement (014589 at T₁₁). The ten-pitch collection thus implies a

harmonic shift (coordinated with Vere's shift of attention from the mist to Claggart), and one could argue that the delayed last triad represents a separate incomplete series of mist chords.

Before the next full sequence occurs at R.31, during Claggart's initial attempt to accuse Billy (R.5+4–6 and R.6 – 6+2), there are two wisps of mist that have been taken to refer ironically to the stammer figures.⁴⁸ There is also a passage with some resemblance to the mist chords, starting at R.28 –4. Here, too, triads (but also 7th chords) are “stacked” to unfold larger collections. What's portrayed here, however, is the dying away of the breeze; not only is the motion in waves—unlike the mist, which only rises—but the collections vary in size from seven to twelve pitches as a function of the size of each gesture (i.e., smaller collections for smaller waves). As we shall see, the variation in the size of the collections of the mist chords is, by contrast, organized at a deeper level of structure.

The next mist series (R.31) occurs when the dying wind forces Vere to fire a shot at the French ship even though it is out of range. The sequence is repeated a perfect 4th lower at R.32, then once more a whole-step higher at R.34, when it becomes evident that the wind has completely died, and the mist is closing in, making further pursuit impossible. (Note that the formerly ever-changing yet changeless mist has become a literally changeless set, as befits its now symbolic status.) The return of the second mist collection immediately follows—in inversion—at R.34+2. The frustration of the hopes of the men to see action now threatens to turn ugly, and they are ordered belowdecks. Claggart returns at this point (R.37+12) to press his case against Billy Budd—he had been interrupted by the sighting of the French ship and the pursuit—so the symbolic connection of Claggart's false accusation and the mist is underlined yet again. Note also that some motivic features of Claggart's music are, like the mist collection, now inverted.

Four different major and minor triads can be culled from a collection of as few as six pitches or as many as all twelve, yet most of the collections underlying the several sequences of mist chords have exactly nine. Even though nine is the arithmetic mean between six and twelve, that so many of the collections have nine pitches is unlikely to be purely a statistical phenomenon. It

48. Mervyn Cooke, “Britten's *Billy Budd*: Melville as Opera Libretto,” in the *Cambridge Opera Handbook*, 37. These seem to me rather to make another connection between Claggart's circumlocutions and the mist.

seems reasonable to conclude that either Britten was using nine-pitch collections or that something about the way he chose the constituent triads assured that the total number of pitches would almost always be nine. A motivic element—that each successive arpeggiated triad usually starts a whole step lower than the last note of the preceding triad—does not account for predominance of nine-pitch collections, because it is possible to construct four such triads from any number of pitches, including all twelve. Another possible explanation is that Britten was avoiding certain pitches or favoring others. In the nine-pitch collections, however, no pitches seem to be consistently avoided; the only pitch present in all the sequences is B \flat , most probably for tonal reasons. (Whether Britten did this consciously or “by ear,” it is unlikely to be a coincidence.)

We will presently return to a consideration of pitch choice in the mist chords and some seemingly disconnected strands will, I hope, begin to be woven together. Thus far, we know that the mist chords are often evoked by major–minor pairs that derive from the 014589 hexachord. I will now show that the series of mist chords are also part of a larger process governing the entire first scene of act 2 and the succeeding interlude. Moreover, this process reaches its climax in the second scene, with the murder of Claggart and, further, becomes the model for one of the ways in which the interview then links with the scenes that follow it.

The “mist” interlude before act 2, scene 2, like the preceding scene, features piled-up triads built from nine-pitch collections, though now the triads start in the bass; they again reach above the treble staff but now number six or seven triads in each “stack.” Rupprecht points out that each stack is framed by its initial triad; this creates another level of harmonic organization, diagrammed in example 9c.⁴⁹ A melody based on Vere’s plea to God for understanding (“O for the light,” R.49+3) occupies the middle register, unmoored from the elements both above and below, much the way the world can appear in a fog. (Note in the example that the melody, on the one hand, and the framing triads and bass line, on the other, seem to have complementary transpositions of 014589 as their organizing principles.) Then as the interlude “imperceptibly”

49. Here the quasi-tonal organization is hardly audible, unlike the many passages in the opera where the music presents itself as tonal but is nontonal at a deeper level. Rupprecht’s statement (p.111) that “each chordal chain is bounded by a single ‘tonic’ triad (B \flat minor [here referring to his example])” should not be misread to indicate that B \flat minor bounds all the chains instead of only the first two.

accelerates toward Vere's apparent epiphany ("Claggart, John Claggart," R.57), the source collections of the mist chords grow from nine to ten pitches (at R.51 –5; see the table), then to eleven pitches (R.52)—but it will only be *after* the murder of Claggart by Billy that all twelve pitches sound in the final mist chord at Vere's words "the mist has cleared" (R.72 –1; see below, ex.11b); it will be, alas, the *second* time he says something of the sort. In view of the acceleration toward Vere's invocation of Claggart, the gestural resemblance of the mist stacks to a passage in Claggart's "Credo" (act 1, R.109) is noteworthy as well.

When the mist truly clears, after the murder, an imaginary ideal listener would realize, with a jolt akin to Vere's, that the "natural" reading of the clouds of pitches—as *representing* what has been obscuring Vere's (and our) vision—is actually its reverse: What have been obscured are the pitches *missing* from each mist chord—first three, then two, then one. Britten seems carefully to arrange the chords so that each of eleven pitches is at one time or another omitted. Of these eleven, B \sharp and F \sharp are omitted least, and in the mist interlude A \flat is always present after R.50+9. While it is possible that the *near* omnipresence of these pitches has some meaning, it must be inevitable that when composing with nine-pitch collections (not to mention ten- and eleven-pitch ones), some pitches will occur more frequently than others and approach ubiquity. (A possible explanation for the presence of the A \flat is that it reflects the gradual transition from the quasi-B \flat minor of the interlude to the D Lydian, with its G \sharp , that begins act 2, scene 2. More important to note is that these "keys" are minor and major, and four semitones apart.)

What can hardly be an accident, however, is the presence of one pitch never "obscured by the mist": B \flat , often considered the "tonic" of the opera as a whole. As if to underline this and summarize the "argument" of the mist interlude, when a last gesturally incomplete eight-pitch mist chord sounds at R.54+8, it is cut off in the next bar by the first melodic phrase in the interlude to approach the use of all twelve pitches (see ex.9d). The phrase uses only eleven, in fact, and the missing pitch is, for the first time, B \flat (also entirely absent from the accompaniment). This is apparently the moment when Vere arrives at what he *thinks* is clarity and shortly thereafter says "The mists are vanishing" for the first time. One might speculate that the falsity of Vere's first epiphany, at the beginning of act 2, scene2, may be indicated by the

lack of B \flat . His triumphant aria (“I am not so easily deceived”) rings very false in any case, its major-key certainty undermined by its Lydian modality.⁵⁰

But, not at all speculatively, B \flat is also the pitch associated with discipline on the ship, the pitch the officers sing in unison to restore order both in act 1, scene 1, and act 2, scene 4 (with a similar harmonic context, 348E (0158), in both cases). As such, in the latter scene it is the focus of a filling-in of the complete chromatic, in the wordless choral fugato of protest following Billy’s hanging, Britten’s musical realization of Melville’s description, “the freshet-wave of a torrent suddenly swelled by pouring showers in tropical mountains, showers not shared by the plain; . . . the first muffled murmur of its sloping advance through precipitous woods.”⁵¹

Example 10 shows how the fugato begins with the collection E034678 (0145(7)89 at T₁₁) composed out in the first several entries of the subject (through R.134+11ff). The goal, B \flat , is immediately present as a prominent passing A \sharp in the second basses, but assuming that the harmonic pitches of the subject are the members of the G \sharp minor triad plus neighboring 6th, E, the initial seven-pitch collection is presented as 8E34, then E67 and 4E0. Filling in of the remaining five pitches of the chromatic (1259T) proceeds: 95 (in 945, in the first tenors, at R.135), then 2 (briefly in the first basses’ 72 at R.135+1, then in 72 and 29 at R.136), and concurrently with the imposition of discipline, T, at R.136+2–3, the 1 (in 189). It is intriguing that the officers’ disciplinary B \flat , T, *completes* the men’s previous motive of protest, 29. Thus, the B \flat that Vere wants to be his ultimate salvation is in fact the element of his character that has caused what he most regrets: his rigid adherence to discipline, which led to Billy’s execution. So strong is his desire to undo what he has done that he converts Billy’s forgiveness of his failure into an imagined state of grace.

Another ambivalence, the overlap of *charis* and *eros*, i.e., brotherly and erotic love, is of course very close to the core of both Melville’s story and the opera, but perhaps only Whitman in

50. Another reading is possible: If we take the Lydian modality to stand for the hexachord 024679 (see ex.6d) at T₂, or 24689E, combining it with B \flat minor, T15, gives us the first mist collection, 01235689T at T₈ (89TE12457). In other words, Vere is still figuratively in the mist despite his self-assurance that he now sees clearly. Also, see the discussion of the Prologue and example 13a, below.

51. Melville, *Billy Budd*, ch. 27.

U.S. literature—with the idea of “adhesiveness”—has managed to state the issue clearsightedly. My earlier suggestion that Britten identified with Billy Budd does not contradict his undoubted identification with Vere as well: Britten’s sexual attachments to young boys were consistently (and, the evidence seems to show, exclusively—with one possible youthful exception) expressed as a kind of intense fatherly or big-brotherly interest, but it should be remembered that *eros* has a strong element of identification with its object.⁵²

DIGRESSION AS A STRUCTURAL PRINCIPLE

The compositional use of the mist chords also involves the technique of digression, to which we now return. Compare the return of the mist chords with the way the interview chords recur, which is as odd as the way they were first presented: while the interview chords are immediately recognizable by texture and instrumentation (the recurrences of a¹–k are always orchestrated in precisely the same way), the passage never comes back in exactly the same form, chord for chord. Rather, it is *re-created* (or it may be better to say continuously created) presumably by the same or similar processes. Why is this, and what significance might it have? It is certainly a beautiful image of the way memory re-creates the past, as well as being evocative of the ever-changing aspect of the “infinite sea.”⁵³ The mist chords also occur several times and in different guises but, as we saw, not in the form of recapitulation: It is as if the mist is *there*, and the ship is sailing into and out of it (in Billy’s description of his stammer, “it comes and it goes”). This “stammering” structure accords well with what might be taken to be a central message of the opera, that goodness is not a steady state—implying that ultimate salvation may not be available. From one point of view, expressed by Vere in the Prologue, this variability is a flaw in goodness. The authors of the opera, however, want to deny that complete salvation is achievable while we

52. For an unusually fair discussion of Britten’s sexuality, see John Bridcut, *Britten’s Children* (London: Faber and Faber, 2006). Another way to view the *charis/eros* dichotomy is, instead, in terms of a three-way division that corresponds to Emslie’s themes: *charis* (social), *eros* (sexual), and *agape* (spiritual).

Concerning the identification of pitches with features of the drama, including characters, see appendix 2.

53. It also might be thought to look forward to Britten’s interest in Asian music, such as the gamelan that influenced *The Turn of the Screw* and other later works. This is “process music” that is not, however, minimalist.

live. Perhaps there is a “peace that passes understanding” and a place where one will “anchor forever,” but not in this life.⁵⁴ This structural idea, based on digression, finds its way into the music on all levels, including the desire to bridge the gaps between the acts 1 and 2, and 3 and 4 in the original version (though this was also modeled on *Wozzeck*).

Two related instances of the structural principle of digression involving a single collection—the first mist collection, 01235689T—are shown in examples 11a and 11b. It turns out that this nine-pitch collection has an eight-pitch subset, 01235689, that accounts (at T_0) for all the pitches of the four chords interpolated into the oscillation of a^1 and k after R.103 (see the asterisks in ex.1b). The pitch in the nine-pitch mist collection missing from the interpolated chords is T, $B\flat$. When the interview chords come back (or “continue”) at the end of act 2, scene 3—not in the same order, but with strong reminders of the interview (e.g., the voicing of the $A\flat$ major chord at R.117+7 and the orchestration of the $D\flat$ and D major chords at R.118 and R.118+3)—the most striking difference is the last benedictory $B\flat$ minor chord at R.118+8, which takes the place of the interpolated $D\flat$ major chord at R.103+11. But it’s not just a conventional reference to a minor plagal “amen”—its long-interrupted completion of the nine-pitch collection seems to give it that much more impact (ex.11a).

Even given the link provided by the recomposition of the interpolated chords in the ballad (shown in ex. 6a and 6c), one might object that to ask the reader to believe that such a culmination of a subtle process is perceptible, particularly after some fifteen minutes, is to assume a credulity that will hold up under considerable strain. There is always the commonsense complaint that analysis finds too much: features of a work that could never be perceived in “real time.” Of these, many are open to the accusation—often enough, with justice—that a specious order as been imposed by the analyst, if only by a kind of unconscious “wish fulfillment.” Even when a critic allows that what analysis reveals has validity, the charge can be made to stick that it could have been shown only by analysis—in other words, it might as well be an artifact of analysis for all its relevance to one’s *experience* of the work. I think I am far from alone, however, in having experienced in a work a sense of meaning that was inexplicable at the time.

54. Vere’s words in the Epilogue quote St. Paul’s epistle to the Philippians, 4.7, and allude to the epistle to the Hebrews, 6.19, respectively.

This sense can range from a feeling of satisfaction that a certain chord is exactly “right” to a literally hair-raising sensation of the uncanny. The B \flat minor chord at the end of Billy’s last scene, for example, can give one a frisson. For music to have as profound a sense of meaning as it does, it must work in more complex ways than what can be grasped immediately: Why did the idea occur to me that what I have called the interpolated chords in the interview could be understood as a harmonic progression? It is not *prima facie* a very convincing idea. To suggest the following answer admittedly does seem to beg the question, but could it not be that the idea had its source in an unconscious perception of the progression’s later appearance in the ballad? I am asserting that it is possible, therefore, to experience something but only be able to account for it by later analysis. Perception is capable of more than we can be aware of in “real time.”⁵⁵

The same nine-pitch collection (the source of the first mist chords) whose completion is delayed from the interview to the plagal ending of Billy’s last aria is involved in another dramatic nexus, and in a similar way. Vere’s *second* statement that the “mists have cleared” (R.72 –1; ex.11b) is set to a melody that composes out eight of the nine pitches of 01235689T (at T₁₀) while the orchestra unfolds the ultimate *twelve-pitch* mist chord (itself the long-interrupted culmination of the increasing inclusiveness of the mist collections). Then Vere’s next line, “O terror, what do I see?” leaps up to the last pitch of the collection—in set terms, again T (at T₁₀, or G \sharp). Note that the triadic formations in Vere’s vocal line *do not* correspond to a simple transposition of the triads of the first series of mist chords—an argument for viewing the *collection* as a source. I make no claim that anyone but the imaginary ideal listener would be aware of these correspondences, but that leaves only three alternatives: they came about by coincidence; Britten intuited them; or he intended them. The would-be positivist will stick with the first answer, but what in the realm of science can be defended as rigor looks in the realm of criticism like lack of acuity, or just avoidance of effort. Between the other two it is difficult to choose without evidence from the composer, but I will maintain that it is possible to hear

55. In the foregoing, I am of course improperly combining what are strictly speaking at least two processes, perception and cognition. Moreover, the study of visual perception has shown that what seem to be simple sense data are assemblages of a number of separate perceptual processes. Then again, there is no reason to believe that cognition is any simpler or in principle more available to consciousness.

something (the echo that both Rupprecht and I hear of the mist chords in the interview) and pursue it analytically until the mist clears.

Not every inclusion of one set in another should pass muster, however; with such large collections, coincidence becomes very likely. For example, the nine-pitch collection 01245789T (this is T_7 of normal order, 01235679T) is the inversion of the first mist chord collection, 01235689T, whose significance at several key points in the opera has emerged in the foregoing. This inversion has as subsets two collections that together account for the “O heave” choruses of act 1, scene 1: 014789 (at T_2), the source collection of the accompanying drones (ex.6e), and 0124589T (at T_1), the source of both the drones and the melody. The smaller set can be derived from 014589 (by way of 0145(7)89, as shown in ex.6d), and the larger set includes it. These sets need to be transposed by different intervals to be the source of the “O heave” choruses, however, so their common relationship to 014589 is a better explanation than their relationship to each other or to the mist collection. (Art, under critical scrutiny, tends to look overdetermined, so Occam’s razor—“the simplest explanation is the best”—doesn’t always apply. But simpler is usually better.)

Britten could have found his way to the 014589 hexachord in any number of ways: by its symmetry, or from the 014 trichords that make it up, or from combining triads, major four semitones above minor or three major triads four semitones apart (such as the first three triads in the interview)—to mention the most probable possibilities. We will have occasion to examine the Prologue in detail, and one of the results of that examination will be to show how Britten leads the listener into an understanding of his harmonic materials in the first few minutes of the opera. It well may be that his process reflects Britten’s own discovery, as he wrote, of the ramifications of his materials.

It is evident that Britten was also thinking in terms of the total chromatic: The choice of the particular nine-pitch collection (01235689T at T_2) as the source of the first mist chords is related both to 014589 and to what follows the chords in the first scene of act 2. The nine-pitch collection contains 014589 (in set terms, as 12569T; the actual pitches are 3478E0) and the remaining three members of the set, 803 (actual pitches, T25), form a major triad. Keeping in mind that 014589 is its own complement and is often expressed as two triads, one major and one minor, it is clear that when we have that hexachord plus a major triad what remains of the twelve

pitches must be a minor triad. In the first scene of act 2, the nine-pitch collection is heard in the form of the first mist chords, adding up to 234578TE0; the missing pitches are 691, an F# minor triad, which soon thereafter features prominently as the referential harmony of Claggart's approach to Captain Vere (see ex. 9a and 9b). This might in fact explain the use of nine-pitch mist collections in general. Note, referring to example 9b, how the missing pitches emerge in the three following mist chord series, *ascending*, like Claggart to the quarter-deck, and note especially how the last series contains 691 as part of 12569T (014589), whose complement, E03478 (shown in ex.9a), was the source of the initial pairing of C major and G# minor. (The example should not be misinterpreted to represent the *prolongation* of F# minor, however.)

To digress briefly: Considering Claggart's association with F#, it is noteworthy that Britten uses the absence of that pitch as shown in example 11c. When Claggart is struck by Billy's murderous blow (R.70), his descending-4th motive disintegrates over a low pedal B as he dies (surely an *hommage* to the murder scene in *Wozzeck*). In a manner reminiscent of the chords accompanying Claggart's questioning of the new "recruits" in act 1, scene 1 (starting at R.20), the total chromatic is called into action to harmonize his fragmenting motive. After all twelve tones are cycled through twice, however, the third cycle omits one pitch, F#. Vere's panicked reaction (R.71) is in E minor—but with F \flat instead of F#—and a rather hermetic bit of tone painting follows: When Vere tries to prop the body up (R.71+5), F# reappears, only to disappear again two measure later, as the body slumps back!

The interview may appear to be the most radical structural digression of all—a scene in the libretto where both words and actions are refused, and whose music apparently refuses such conventional referents as leitmotifs and even the expressive means of melody and harmonic progression. Yet the musical process started by the wordless interview is coordinated with the libretto even so. When the interview chords come back for the last time in the Epilogue (as Whittall has noted), some of the associations established by Billy—e.g., "I'm content" with A major (R.116–3)—are picked up by Vere ("I'm content," R.143+8), but several of the triads associated with *strength* at the end of Billy's *scena* are missing: the D \flat major (accompanying Billy's words "I'm strong," R.117+1) and the F# minor and B \flat minor (of "I'll stay strong," R. 117+5–6). The D major chord (j) with the Epilogue's word "anchor" was, like D \flat major and F# minor, one of the interpolated chords in the interview scene (R.103+3). But Vere's vision of a

safe harbor is as close as he can come to Billy's self-assured strength. *Anchor* as a verbal motif used by both men has other resonances: The crucifixlike shape, which is lowered and provides security, surely was intended to call up the Christian imagery implicit in Melville original, where Billy is both a type of Adam and a type of Christ ("We committed his body to the deep" also evokes images of Christ being lowered from the cross); the "anchor of hope" dates back to St. Paul's epistle to the Hebrews. Billy in effect *becomes* the anchor. To use the word in a more recent sense derived from psychology, the sight of Billy "hanging from the yardarm" is the anchor of Vere's memory. This is what haunts the Epilogue, and the word *anchor*'s association with a D major triad will turn out to be what binds all these associations together.⁵⁶

The tone D, sung by Vere, is the very last pitch at the end of the opera, as it was the first pitch in the upper voice at the beginning. It is the pitch common to the two 3rds that form the opening 014 trichord, B \flat –D and B \natural –D. And we have just observed that the major triad of D is associated with an important metaphor. That triad was also referential in Vere's first, false epiphany, and it remains central to the music throughout act 2, scene 2, until Claggart's accusation of mutiny (R.68). Later in the scene, Billy's testimony at his trial is in D, starting at R.84 in juxtaposition to B \flat minor—as Vere's epiphany in D Lydian was also in juxtaposition with a large section, the mist interlude, that evolved from B \flat minor. (Despite the intense chromaticism at the end of the mist interlude, shown in example 8c, the last measures before the eruption of D Lydian clearly refer back to B \flat minor.) The completion of the nine-member collection by the plagal ending of Billy's aria is also a local completion of 014589 by a pairing of D major and B \flat minor—a pairing heard also in the interview at R102+6–7.

The constellation of pitches and triads that seem to have specific referents (in the manner of leitmotifs), if we list them, suggests two things: There is, first, an intriguing clustering of significant pitches around the same transposition (T_1) of 014589 that yields the major–minor pair B \flat minor–D major—B \flat the tonic of the opera and the pitch of shipboard discipline, C \sharp of the stammer trills, D of Vere's (false) epiphany and (probably false) salvation, as well as Billy's certainty of strength, Billy's F major fanfares and the ballad as well as Claggart's F minor,

56. Unlike some terms from psychology, this one is metaphorical and could plausibly have occurred to the librettists in its double sense of providing security and limiting movement.

Claggart's F#, and the A major of contentment. This accounting excludes the B major of the first shipboard scene (after the Prologue), the E major/G# minor of the execution scene and its restatement of "Farewell old *Rights o' Man*" in the wordless chorus of protest, and it neglects the G major/G minor of "This is our moment." But these examples all involve both the crew and B natural, the one pitch not in any of the interview chords, which we may therefore speculate represents the public world of the ship. This scheme also neglects C, associated with Vere (his first note; what is taken to be the tonality of the "Starry Vere" passage at the end of act 1, scene 1, and the following scene in Vere's cabin—though C is strangely absent there as a *tonic*, at least in part as a result of cutting Vere's first appearance on deck in the original four-act version, with its big C major chords; his monotone in the trial, which becomes the first pitch of the verdict motive, as well as the first pitch in the interview's arpeggiation of F major; and so on). In any case, that both Billy and Claggart are associated with F should be sufficient warning that we are "approaching Finisterre," and that charts like Mervyn Cooke's that match up keys with characters and dramatic themes may go too far. For one thing, if Britten had been consciously aware of these associations, it might well have constrained his compositional imagination. This putative constellation gives us perhaps more a glimpse into a deeper level where intuition reigns than any kind of insight into artistic intention; some would surely argue that such waters are better left uncharted.

The second suggestion that one might make about this constellation is that it has more than a little to do with the choice of triads in the interview: Britten can use the nondiatonic F# minor—but because of the A of the arpeggiated F major in the top voice, not F# major; yet where he has a choice, it is D major, more than D minor, in spite of the foreign F#, because D minor entails F# major in the major–minor pairings derived from the hexachord. One gets a vague sense that the interview, with its F major melodic armature fleshed out with harmonies derived from 014589—far from being unrelated to the rest of the opera or from requiring forcible integration by its later recurrences—is actually a kind of "skeleton key" that fits the gaps left by the digressive structure and can unlock their mysteries. Some of its fascination and power may reside in the way it exposes a network of relationships yet at the same time withholds them by its forbiddingly monolithic surface. In a manner of speaking, it puts the audience inside Vere's skin, letting us experience something like his inability to see what's quite obvious to us.

The 014589 Hexachord and the Motivic Organization of *Billy Budd*

Individual pitches probably must figure more in the composer's mind than in any listener's, and that must apply to keys (or referential sonorities) and harmonic collections as well, though nontonal collections often have a distinctive sound quality. But it is motives that most reliably *lead* the ear to make connections. Their use has been referred to throughout this essay, but it remains to be explored how they are organized in *Billy Budd* and how they relate to the other features of the opera that have been discussed.

Motives in *Billy Budd* generally are related in two ways: by contour and by shared characteristic intervals. Contour, among other things, allows for relationships between motives not identical intervallically, which reflects the harmonic fact that the music, while not tonal, maintains aspects of tonality on the surface. (This is sometimes called "extended tonality," but Britten may in some ways be a less tonal composer than, say, Bartók—though the reverse may appear to be the case.) Intervallic relationships are based on Britten's use of collections to generate motives—yet another way that *Billy Budd* resembles *Wozzeck*. This dual aspect of the motivic network helps to integrate the tonal and nontonal elements of Britten's harmonic structure. By way of contrast, Charles Ives's music lacks a foreground structure (there is plenty of foreground activity—in fact, were it not so exciting, some might say too much), but it has middleground as well as background tonal coherence. Britten's music seems at times to lack a background in the sense of a *composed-out* contrapuntal structure; his music can sound as if the background is harmonically static. This is not intended as criticism, nor should it be understood as implying a deficiency. The twentieth century showed us that very fine and very great music can be composed that is not structured in all the same ways as the classics from Bach to Brahms. A proclivity to a static background might help to account for Britten's attraction to gamelan as well. The static quality may in fact stem from the kinds of harmonic materials that Britten uses—in the case of *Billy Budd*, hexachords—or from the structural use he makes of them (see the discussion of example 13f, below).

THE PROLOGUE

A voice-leading analysis of the Prologue will be a good way to begin to approach in concrete terms the interplay of harmonic and motivic elements in *Billy Budd*. Britten was reticent about

his compositional process, so there may be no way to be sure how he arrived at his harmonic materials; he probably did so largely by ear, in the course of composing—much the way the Prologue “teaches” the listener to understand those materials, a process we will now consider briefly (see ex.12a). In the alternating eighth notes of the strings, one initially hears an incomplete B \flat major chord—presumably the tonic, but with a “wrong note.” What sounds like a VII \flat_3^6 follows. The queasiness of the opening sonority continues with voice-leading in which what Rupprecht calls the “planes” of the music seem to be slightly out of phase (as though the feeling in one’s stomach is now joined by difficulty in focusing one’s eyes). The conflict between B \flat and B \sharp in the opening string oscillations tells us that this is not conventional tonal music. The listener may well unconsciously begin to ponder how this unfamiliar harmony will behave: Will it “resolve” or move to other equally unfamiliar harmonies? Because of the two-octave separation of the string lines and hints of imitation of the lower by the upper voice, we may initially hear them as discrete lines (and the music will continue to operate in registral layers). When the major 3rd in the lower voices is composed out as a minor 6th, D to B \flat , the relationship between the upper and lower voices—which at first could have been taken as a clash between B minor and B \flat major, reasonably assuming that both 3rds represented root-position triads—is now clarified by quasi-canonic imitation of the lower voice by the upper: as we saw in example 4, both voices are in Mixolydian mode, the lower on B \flat , the upper on G. Then the woodwinds sound all four notes of the opening string lines at the same time and we realize that the music thus far has composed out of a single harmony, 014, prolonged by an apparently straightforward multiple neighbor-note motion akin to the tonic in a tonal context moving to a VII \flat_3^6 . This motion is the result of each tone of the trichord being displaced by half step, T–9, E–0, and 2–3. If one tries to unpack the voice-leading in an attempt to “generate” it from familiar first principles of tonal music, however, the counterpoint becomes considerably more complicated, and example 13b is provided to show the structural depths hidden behind the ostensible simplicity of the surface.⁵⁷ We begin to appreciate how Britten’s music can appear so simple yet convey such a sense of profundity.

57. It ought to go without saying that “generation” does not attempt to lay out the compositional process or some supposed mental process of the composer’s—though it may sometimes correspond in specific

Just after the woodwind chord a third element enters, the 8ves in the brass. They are so salient in part because of their instrumentation and dotted rhythm (in contrast to the even eighth notes of the strings and the sustained woodwinds); and because they are perfect, not augmented, 8ves. Even in themselves, quiet brass 8ves repeating a middle-register note in an insistent dotted rhythm call up associations of funeral marches for heads of state or military heroes. If not “fatal,” there is at least something “fateful” about the 8ves. These initially seemingly unrelated ideas will gradually come together, and in retrospect, another reason for the “rightness” of the brass 8ves will suggest itself. Rhetorically, the 8ves act like punctuation that signals both the end of a phrase and its continuation. Referring to example 12a, observe how the initial 014 trichord (TE2) has alerted us to nontonal language, and we have been made to wonder how the music will continue. In particular, the gap in the trichord might have led us to anticipate its being filled in. Because the gap comprises two adjacent pitches, we might even have guessed that another 014 will act as a continuation. In the event, a different sound, one like a VII_3^6 , has played that role, but two of its pitches, A and C, might have been the 1 and the 4 of the expected 014. So when the 0—the brass $\text{A}\flat$ —enters, some of its power (indeed, even a “fateful” quality) may derive from it being the expected third pitch. The sense of completion that results seems to motivate the curtain’s rise and our first view of Captain Vere.

A few moments later, the descending 4ths that come to be associated with Claggart make the first really distinct motivic shape, which suggests that a memory has come to Vere. He begins to sing (echoing the motive subtly in his first line). Note that immediately before this occurs, the two 014s (890 and TE2) have been suggested more strongly, linked by parallel gestures (dotted rhythms), A–C in the strings moving to B–D in the woodwinds, followed by $\text{A}\flat$ moving for the first time to $\text{B}\flat$ in the brass. The dotted rhythm that is suggested on the surface by the syncopated eighth note c^4 (bar 11) has been prepared even more subtly: In tonal music the use of the VII relies on several factors, chiefly, stepwise motion from I in the bass and the presence of the tritone. One factor, which may not have played an essential part traditionally, emerged as the

ways to one or another aspect of such a process. Nor does it attempt to model directly a listener’s cognitive process. The analogy of “reverse engineering” may be helpful: a generative scheme is an attempt to figure out how something works from outside a “black box”—in effect, what a finished piece of music presents us with, even if we know its constructive rules or have compositional sketches.

others lost weight in an increasingly chromatic context: that VII_3^6 shares no tones with I. The woodwind chord confirmed the equal standing of B_\flat and B_\sharp as consonant pitches (and, thus, the premise that this is not tonal music), so the possibility arises that the VII_3^6 represents a *complement* to the referential trichord. And after the A_\flat , marked by its “martial” rhythm—a doubly dotted quarter note followed by a sixteenth (7:1), the first rhythm not in even eighths—is introduced, the 3rd A–C is composed out in the upper voice, now the *dux* in a quasi-canon. Most remarkably, the motion of a sixth from A down to C lasts twenty eighth notes and the C lasts three eighths ($20:3 \approx 7:1$)!

After the extension of the martial/funereal rhythm into a statement of what will become Claggart’s motive and Vere’s first words, the A–C and the A_\flat are finally sounded together (R.1+1), whereupon the B_\flat –B–D trichord is at the succeeding cadence extended to TE267 (014_89). It may occur to the listener at this point in the music that if the A_\flat trichord is filling in a gap, it is a gap *below* the B_\flat 014, and that trichord is only part of a larger harmony; a division of the chromatic scale begins to seem probable with the first confrontation of two almost complete mutually exclusive hexachords at the end of Vere’s first line and the beginning of the second (“I have also read books”). The audible change of harmony here (coordinated with Vere’s change of topic) is created with the remarkable disruption of the octaves by a 014 before the cadence on a C_\sharp dominant $\frac{6}{5}$ (R.1+5). The trichord helps the ear sort out that as the staff below the third system of example 12a shows, the A in the upper voice anticipates the new harmony; the A in the lower voice, however, is a melodic embellishment of the motion from F_\sharp to G, which completes the old harmony. The A_\flat trichord has prolonged the B_\flat trichord up to this point, but in the next few bars the roles are reversed; the change of harmony reflects Vere’s shift from talking about his military experience to describing his studies. Throughout the initial measures, E_\flat has been heard with the A_\flat 014 even though it is a member of the B_\flat hexachord. This sort of freedom (or lack of consistency) suggests that Britten was guided by his ear rather than charts—and it fits one’s general impression of his artistic philosophy. In keeping with his ad hoc approach—appropriate to an opera composer, after all—one of Britten’s techniques is to take a motive derived from an important harmonic collection and, by compositionally manipulating it, create an association with other collections. The thirty-second-note figures first heard in the Prologue with Vere’s lines about good never being without some flaw afterward always

accompany Billy's stammer; Rupprecht refers to them as "flicker" chords, a memorably apt if superficial description. Given the explanatory power of collections demonstrated thus far, however, to analyze such rapid figures as two triads, as he does, is the wrong course to take.⁵⁸ The three variants of the five-pitch figure are all derivable from the hexachord 014589. Example 12b shows that when, during the trial, Billy says of his stammer that "it comes and it goes," the figure is slowed to sixteenths and modified by the presence of a bass B natural (recalling the moment of the murder) to 56TE2 at R.86 –3; the figure is soon further slowed and altered (by semitone inflection of two of its pitches) to 57TQ2, i.e., "Starry Vere," for the musically self-answering question, "Poor fellow, who could save him?"—with *save* set on D (R.89+1–2). (I must confess that because it traces the passage "phenomenologically," the example departs from strict set analysis.)

Beyond guiding the audience's ears to an initial grasp of the unfamiliar workings of *Billy Budd's* musical language, the gradual merging of elements that we have been exploring portrays how the *disjuncta membra* of the past come together to form a memory—in this case, Captain Vere's. His narration of his memory becomes the opera.

The foregoing has focused on the "educational" aspect of the Prologue, so our close reading needs to backtrack to examine some other aspects of the opera's initial bars; the complete foreground sketch of the Prologue is example 13a. The form of the Prologue is A-B-A'; this is reflected both in the gestural and harmonic organization, though those aspects are not completely coordinated with each other.

Because the passing chords 0134 and 0145 (bars 9–11) are built from modal collections, where the difference between a half-step and a whole step can be discounted, they are used interchangeably. That feature does not make this music tonal—as we have seen, the treatment of dissonance militates against such an interpretation—but motives founded on the two tetrachords (as well as on 0135) are treated as strongly related or even equivalent throughout the opera. In an *ostensibly* tonal passage (that is, a passage that represents demotic music, but is in fact a sophisticated mixture of diatonic and chromatic tonality as well as chromaticism that crosses

58. Rupprecht's term (p.92) follows one of the reviews of the premiere, by J. E. Waterhouse, quoted in *Letters* (p. 694). While my example 13f, section 4, relies on what looks like a similar analysis, its point is motivic resemblance rather than harmonic definition, which is better understood in terms of collections.

over into the nontonal) such as the setting of “Billy in the Darbies,” motives with the same contour but different intervals are meant to be heard as the same. The similar treatment given motives built on distinct tetrachords is also supported by the relationship to 014 and 014589 that 0134 and 0145 have in common.

The cadence on a C# dominant $\frac{6}{5}$ seems odd. If, as we have begun to suspect, the context is one of complementary hexachords, then three of its four pitches (158) belong to the complement of TE2367, 014589, and as Vere intones the A \flat (8, here spelled G#), another two members of the members of the complement, 09, are added. The tonal–nontonal ambiguity prevails for two measure until Vere suddenly launches into the head motive of the canon (R.2 –6; the two parts are now parallel). As I mentioned in the previous discussion of major–minor pairs of triads, the climax of the first section of the Prologue (at the words “eternal truth”) composes out a complete B \flat 014589 hexachord (i.e., TE2367) in that form during the next three and a half measures, outlining E \flat major and B minor triads. When the passage cadences on F# (R.2 –3), the two kinds of music seem to have become separate: the tonal music has—somehow—moved from a dominant 7th chord to its resolution, but the intervening music has introduced the composing out of a nontonal hexachord (though presented as two triads).

The cadence also marks the conclusion of an unfolding of the trichord 014 in the outer voices (67T in the bass and TE2 in the upper voice), implicitly composing out the TE2367 (014589 at T₁₀) in the middleground. When the trill, 12, begins, however, the last interval in the outer voices, 6T, acts as a “pivot” and is reinterpreted as implying 12569T (014589 at T₁).

The balance of tonality and nontonality now feels less settled, and it is possible that Britten intended the listener to share what Vere experienced as he “*tried to fathom* eternal truth.” The rapid woodwind figures (each a tetrachordal subset of some transposition of 014589; see ex. 13e, section 4) of the “stammer” music follow the vocal line, doubling it with their first, last, or highest notes. All twelve tones are gradually introduced as the pitch content changes from one tetrachord to the next, though almost every tetrachord has at least one pitch in common with the preceding one (see the figure on the next page). The exceptions are the third tetrachord (in connection with the words “some flaw in it”) and the ninth, in which the last remaining pitch class, 7, is stated. Then for the first time, a tetrachord is repeated—clearly tone-painting the word *stammer*! The twelfth tetrachord is repeated twice in parallel 013 trichords, which combined with

					last pc				
trill		1	(2)						
1.			2		6		T	E	[0148]
2.		1	2		6		T		[0159]
3.	0			3	4				[0159] ← no common tones ("some flaw in it"?)
4.		1			5			8	9
5.	0	1			5			8	
6.			2		5	6		T	[0159]
7.		1		4	5			9	[0158]
8.		1	2		6			9	[0158]
9.	0			4		7		8	[0159] ← no common tones, then repetition ("stammer"!)
10.	0			4		7		8	
11.	0			4				8	E [0159]
12.	{	E	2	3		7			}
(13,14)		0	2	3	5	6		8	
									parallel [0159]

the trill give eleven tones. (The presence of twelve tetrachords may be Britten's small private joke concerning his use of dodecapronic procedures.) The vocal part uses only eleven pitches in this passage—there is no B \flat —but unlike the eleven pitches in the climactic parallel trichords in the woodwinds, which use as many tones as possible,⁵⁹ the omission from the vocal line is clearly intentional and meaningful, because when one looks back to the beginning one realizes that there has been no B \flat at all in the vocal part, despite the clear centrality of that pitch! (The first B \flat comes only after Vere's cry of "What have I done?" and then it is almost obsessively repeated.)

With its focus on unfolding the complete chromatic, the B section is nontonal and the rules governing the relationship between its structural levels are more difficult to pin down. On the surface the unfolding of all twelve pcs in the accompaniment (and eleven in the voice) governs the structure. At the level that Schenker would call the foreground—where there is already some hierarchy of tones—example 13c shows how the vocal line emphasizes a rising whole-tone ascent from C \sharp to E \sharp (F); after the F descends an octave, the whole-tone filling continues on the

59. See appendix 3.

surface from G up to D as neighbor to C#, thus completing another reference to 014, C#–F–D–C#. A boundary play then composes out the same trichord, as C#–E–C–D \flat . On a deeper level, the highest point of the line, A \flat –G (at the words “divine song”), recalls the pitches that on the surface initiated a reference to “This is our moment,” G–B–D–C# (at the words “divine image”); this clarifies that at a further remove, the whole passage outlines the same motive transposed by a tritone: C#–F–(C#)–A \flat –G. (This motive also evokes a derivative hexachord, 024679, variously connected with Billy and Vere; see ex. 13f, section 5, 14a, and 14b. Please note that most of the numbers in example 13c refer to pcs: “6–5” may be a bit disconcerting if this is not kept in mind. Tonal intervals are here set in bold to distinguish them from pcs, e.g., “**10**.”)

The expanded motivic reference to the choral number in act 2, scene 1—though it refers *ahead* to music we have yet to hear—is indubitable, given both the doubling of the voice in the “stammer” figures and the use of register. But I find it difficult to relate to the surface priority of unfolding all twelve tones. Meanwhile, in the accompaniment, various transpositions of 014589 are invoked as sources for the “stammer” figures; again, T₁, 12569T, seems to govern the middleground, given the F# major triad (6T₁) and the trill (12). The C#, we saw, is what implies the harmonic shift—the other tones are also members of 014589 at T₁₀, TE2367—but the C# could hardly be more conspicuous. And while the vocal line has its own harmonic “plane,” its most salient tone, F (5), also contributes to the sense of 12569T as the prevailing harmony.

Remarkably, some of the voice-leading elements of the earlier passage that begins with the cadence on C# dominant $\frac{6}{5}$ (“I have also read books”)—namely, the chromatic line from the top-voice D, C#–C \sharp –B–A#/B \flat , and the associated bass line, F–A \flat –G–F#—are recomposed as the framework for the voice-leading on two levels in the B section (see ex. 13d). The recomposition reflects the words of the two passages, which present Vere’s two faces—the initial scholarly “pondering” of general “eternal truths” is shown to mask the specific and disturbing truth that the “good” is “never perfect” (note the internal rhyme of *eternal* and *perfect*) and the “confusion” about “what have I done?” that perhaps has given special urgency to the reading and studying and pondering and “try[ing] to fathom” of a man who had such proclivities in any case.

Over the course of the Prologue, the organization of the vocal line has two features: (1) In the first A and in the B section, it uses only eleven tones—omitting B \flat ; and (2) whereas in both A sections it is largely integrated with the accompanying harmony, in the B section it has its own

harmonic organization, composing-out 014589 at T_0 , then T_{11} , while the accompaniment prolongs T_1 . Note that the third section, A', begins *harmonically* at the climax, "O what have I done?" which restores T_{10} as the referential hexachord in both vocal line and accompaniment; the *gestural* return of the A section is coordinated only with the compulsive repetitions of the first use of $B\flat$ in the voice. The general impression is therefore quasi-tonal in the A sections but nontonal or even twelve-tone in the B section. In the A' section, one tone is again held in reserve, but it is $C\sharp$; after its prominence in the B section, this makes sense. Moreover, when it completes the chromatic (as it did in the first A section) with the second reference to Claggart's descending 4ths, its having been held back enhances its impact. The repeated $D-B\sharp-B\flat$ in the voice echoes and sums up the background voice-leading as well (see p.2 of ex.13c). Note how the pitches of the hexachords articulate the structure—in particular, holding pc 9 back from the embellishing 12569T until the climactic return of TE2367. The second system of the example shows how, at a deeper level, holding back pc 3 similarly articulates the beginning of scene 1, with the marked sense of arrival on B major at R.4.

When the Prologue music returns in the Epilogue, its last cadence (act 1, R.3+15–17) is repeated literally (act 2, R.140+2–5) as if the memory that encapsulates the entire opera had flashed through Vere's mind in an instant. As a matter of fact, however, very little of the Prologue music recurs exactly, and even when the Epilogue closely corresponds to the Prologue (as in "O what have I done?"), it introduces subtle differences in keeping with a very different structural agenda. One passage that closely parallels the Prologue is the the line about the harsh cries of the birds being Billy's requiem (the first several lines are freely adapted from Melville),⁶⁰ with the difference that it was purely instrumental at the beginning of the opera (bars 10–12); the addition of a vocal line and the timpani in this instance also allows Britten a crucial motivic reference that we will need to come back to (see ex.17a, below). Another passage that closely follows the Prologue (again with a vocal line added) can more accurately be described as a recomposition (see ex.13e).

60. Melville, *Billy Budd*, ch.27: "As the ship under light airs passed on, leaving the burial spot astern, they kept circling it low down with the moving shadow of their outstretched wings and the croaked requiem of their cries"

Because 014589 is so fundamental to the sound of the *Billy Budd*, many of the motives in the opera derive from it or relate to it in some way. In particular, the salience of a semitone is characteristic of motives throughout. The table of motives, example 13f, is not intended to be exhaustive; its furthest reaches are suggestive, not affirmative. Some very important motives do not come directly from the referential hexachord: as example 12b showed, Britten was able to assert a relationship between the hexachord-based motive of the “stammer” figures and “Starry Vere,” a pentatonic motive, by juxtaposing them compositionally. The hexachord also lacks whole steps and tritones, yet those are important intervals in *Billy Budd*. They can, however, be derived from the hexachord’s self-complementation—an inherent characteristic of the collection—and it is possible to trace much of the material that is not directly related to the hexachord back to it through such second-order relationships, especially given the freedom Britten gains by combining tonal and nontonal principles. Yet, because of Britten’s reticence in discussing his compositional techniques, it is possible that even with extensive sketch studies, such findings may forever remain speculative.

DERIVED HEXACHORDS: ACT 1, SCENE 2

In connection with the structural potential of hexachords, it should be noted that the Prologue’s complexities are not intrinsic to the materials. I will briefly discuss an intriguing passage at the beginning of act 1, scene 2, that quite straightforwardly composes out 023579 (one of the hexachords derived from 014589; refer to ex. 6d). This passage is usually described as being “in C,” in which case, the prolongation would be of a kind of V^7 chord with “added tones”; I am not convinced that such a description clarifies much about the music (see ex. 14a). The derived hexachord, 023579, can be understood as formed from two minor triads a whole step apart, one from the 014589 hexachord at T_n and one from its complement (014589 at $T_{n\pm 2}$). As we have seen, there are three major–minor pairs of triads for each of the four transpositions with distinct pc content of the 014589 hexachord (a transposition that is four semitones up or down from any given transposition replicates its pc content, for obvious reasons). If Britten did derive 023579 in the manner implied—by switching the members of major–minor pairs from complementary hexachords into minor–minor (and major–major) pairs—it could be an extension of the process by which he may have hit upon the 014589 hexachord in the first place, that is, by combining

triads. Britten uses the major–minor pairs frequently to create a contrast (e.g., in Billy’s arietta, the glory of being foretopman on the one hand and the storms below on the other), and one can speculate that by combining two minor triads, he had in mind to portray Vere’s habitual weighing of alternatives. The music does certainly convey the stillness and isolation of the captain’s cabin (especially in contrast with the bustling choral number at the end of scene 1, the end of act 1 in the original four-act version).

Example 14b shows how the harmony is in fact first introduced in the preceding scene as part of a prolongation based on the pentatonic collection expressed by the “Starry Vere” motive (see ex.13f, section 5a, for the connection of the motive with 014589). The pentatonic collection is a subset of both the major–major and the minor–minor derived hexachords; when the two hexachords are combined in such a way that they have the maximum number of common pcs (five, i.e., the pentatonic pitches of the Starry Vere motive) the result is the diatonic major scale, which Britten uses, however, more like a heptachordal collection. But the hexachords are what govern foreground detail: for example, when Donald sings “Starry Vere we call him” (R.58 –3) and Billy responds, Billy’s line completes the hexachord—with the *same pitches* he will later sing “Starry Vere, God bless you” (2, R.131 –2)! The first time we hear 24579E (023579, the minor–minor collection) in the chordal form it will take in the next scene is with Donald’s description of Vere as “good” (R.58+6); he and the others are singing the captain’s praises to Billy, who is quickly convinced that he should devote himself loyally to Vere. Billy’s ratification of the general sentiment (R.59 –2) is set to the complement of 24579E, that is, 68T013 (024679*i*), the major–major collection first heard in the fanfares that accompany his arrival on the ship. His interlocking 4ths are second-order derivatives of 014589 (see ex.13f, section 3b); these 4ths continue beyond Billy’s line, “Starry Vere . . . I’m for you,” and merge with the return of the Starry Vere motive at R.59. An inversion (or strictly, a retrograde) of the motive seems to be implied by the sustained brass chords of the choral apotheosis. The Novice’s motive earlier in the scene is also a tonal inversion of Vere’s (ex.13f, section 5b), and “Starry Vere” in fact emerges as a bass line to the Novice’s motive when the Novice returns from being flogged at R. 42. This mirroring of the motives is not something Britten could have been unaware of, and it is very suggestive though not central to the story. It seems reasonable to assume that the politically left composer wanted to suggest that the Novice’s flogging was inseparable from Vere’s

elevation. This qualifies Vere's glory and makes it more complex without undercutting it, and it prepares one sense of the ending of the opera: Vere is as much a victim of his position as the other characters are.

It is worth mention that E03478, the transposition of 014589 (T_{11}) that is the source of one of the minor triads in the derived 24579E hexachord, E minor (47E), and one of the major triads in Billy's complementary set as he swears loyalty, G# major (803), connects Billy's ascent to the foretop with his ultimate ascent to the yardarm. Thus it is quite appropriate that it is invoked (if indirectly) at the moment when Billy commits himself to serving Vere (shortly after having again used the same pitches as his final blessing of the captain), and that it is part of the music that establishes the connection of Vere with the pitch C.

That pitch is set apart in several different ways during the close of scene 1, and it continues to be set apart as scene 2 begins. Rather than saying the passage is "in C" it would be more accurate to say it is "about C." When the hexachord is first introduced, it is composed out by the pentatonic Starry Vere motive as a bass ostinato, D, E, G, A, B, punctuated by the sixth pc, F, in the treble—but the isolated F, like the bass ostinato, is played *pizzicato*; the C is set apart not only by register and by being the main pitch in a separate rhythmic figure in the treble but also by being played *arco* and enhanced by a trill in the flutes. During Billy's ratification, C is withheld and only enters to complete the chromatic an instant before the " $\frac{6}{4}$ " chord climax of the scene (R.59), where Billy says that he will follow the Captain forever, a promise that takes on an unintended meaning by the end of the opera. At the start of scene 2, C is set apart by register and instrumentation (played in treble 8ves by the solo harp against the low string chords).

The background structure shown in example 14a consists entirely of members of the same transposition of the derived hexachord, 24579E; not surprisingly, this gives it a static quality. Here, please note that the background is not potentially misleading in the way discussed in connection with act 2, scene 3 (ex.7e). The outer voices are apparently modeled on tonal examples, with descending stepwise motion in the upper voice and motions in 3rds in the bass. But tonal structures have the advantage of triadic harmonies in which the triads have varying degrees of similarity based on common tones and different functions based on distance measured in 5ths. Hexachords, in contrast—to oversimplify somewhat—depend largely on complementation (as in the Prologue). In tonal music every tone of the diatonic scale can be

harmonized by a triad that shares at least one tone with the tonic triad (it is naturally somewhat more complicated in practice); in a structure rigorously based on complementation it is hard to see how a stepwise line could, on the one hand, hold together if some of its members were harmonized by the complement or, on the other, avoid implying a distinction between structural and nonstructural tones based on membership in the referential collection. In this case, the structural problem is solved because each pitch in the descending line in the top voice can be harmonized by any member of the hexachord, but the cost of the solution is that complementation never reaches the background; even the important decorative tones in the line, the passing tone F \sharp and the incomplete neighbor C \sharp , are harmonized by collections that share common tones with the hexachord being prolonged.

The passage is successful in creating levels of prolongation that are articulated by both outer voices: The approaching contrasting harmony (014589) is “anticipated” by an incomplete neighbor in the upper line, an inner-voice inflection, and the chromatic passing tone in the bass (the numerals in example 14 again refer to pitches, not intervals). Then, in a reference to the preceding scene’s choral setting of “the French,” three different transpositions of 014589 are invoked, both completing the chromatic and making the transition back to 24579E (023579). In section 0 of example 13f, there is a passage from slightly later in the scene, in which three different transpositions of 014589 are invoked in the vocal line, also with the purpose of creating a transition (from R.64 –4 to R.64). In the second part of example 14a (after R.61), the motion of the bass from D up to G is worth noting: inner voices of the embellishing harmony, F \sharp and G, are stated in the bass line in a kind of double unfolding of their intervals with D. (The standard Schenkerian symbol for an unfolding of an inner-voice interval, a diagonal beam, could not be used here). Also notice that the upper voice oversteps its goal, D, a feature that is foreshadowed in the inner voice (R. 61+3–5), where the parallel 10ths above the bass are not continued as one might expect. That Britten must have had some awareness of these processes is strongly implied by the coordination of the contrapuntal structure with the stage action. The background structure is in two parts that could be thought to resemble a tonal interruption, but I wonder if the harmonic materials are by nature too remote from those of tonality to allow for a truly analogous process. Note that the scene ends with the return of the opening music (R.74 –8), closing with another convergence of the outer voices on F (R.74+4).

Returning to Port and Dropping Anchor

I have proposed that the presence of cross-relations between the successive interview chords was a determinant of the progression—perhaps the primary one after the decision to limit the chords to those harmonizing the members of the F major triad. With triads, the deliberate invocation of cross-relations is equivalent to assuring that each pair of chords contains the 014 trichord that is the ultimate source of 014589 and so much of the motivic material and harmonic character of the opera (see ex.15a).⁶¹

Cross-relations between two voices traditionally involve the juxtaposition of two pitch classes that represent the same scale step. Since both pitches always form 3rds with some other chord tone, and since one of the 3rds will be major and the other minor, the three pitches involved can be thought of as forming the set 014 (or 034). The abstraction “cross-relation = 014” has little meaning in tonal music, but in posttonal music that continues to use triads and conventional scales or otherwise mixes tonal and nontonal procedures—music such as Britten’s—the abstraction might help show how harmonic materials that appear to be mutually contradictory can be integrated.

61. We have seen that the Prologue composes out 014589 (as TE2367). The one passage quite literally recalled in the Epilogue, “O what have I done?” mirrors the interview’s first three triads’ motion by major 3rds (see ex.13f, section 3, under “first order” connections). As an aside, I suggest that because the Epilogue composes out the same collection, partisans of the interview’s F major as a “dominant” to the “tonic B♭” of the end of the opera might make a better argument if they were to say that the first three triads of the interview add up to 014589 at T₀ and that its *literal* complement, TE2367, governs the Epilogue. But I would still like to see some evidence for a voice-leading connection between those two points that relies on the discovery of a continuous structural argument in the music—such as the evidence I present for the completion of processes at a distance. For example, the completion of the first mist collection at the end of Billy’s scene (see ex.10a) is based at least as much on the voice-leading unity of that scene and its evident continuity with the interview as on the mere return of the interview chords. In contrast, The increasing inclusion of pitches in the mist chords is of a different nature, a long-range gestural process. It is possible, however, given the remarkably extensive structures demonstrated in this essay, that a voice-leading structure also underlies that process—certainly some of the “keys” are reminiscent of significant bass tones in the Prologue and first scene of act 1: B♭, G, F♯, D, and B.

In the Prologue to *Billy Budd*, the first statement of Claggart's descending-4th motive rises through the displaced major 3rd B–C#–D#. Example 15a shows that this 3rd is imitated at the entrance of Vere's voice by his first three pitches, C–D–E♭—both are diatonic 3rd progressions with the same pitch as goal.⁶² The reinterpretation of D#/E♭ is then underscored by a cambiata outlining the diminished 4th E♭ down to B. This extraordinary passage thus sets forth much of the musical material of the opera in a matter of four measures, including two families of motives and the harmonic ramifications implicit in the 014 trichord (B–C–D#/E♭). See example 13f, section 6, for the hair-raising connection between Vere's first line and the verdict motive.

In the juxtaposition of triads during the interview, the cross relations are of a particular type that also involves the reinterpretation of the scale step that a pitch represents. For instance, the C# in A major following F major is initially heard as a D♭, the lowered $\hat{6}$ in F (forming a diminished 4th with A), then normalized as C#, the major 3rd of A and the raised $\hat{5}$ in F. This adjustment is based on the diatonic precept holding that different pitch classes are not to be interpreted as representing the same scale step in immediate succession. Longstanding chromatic practice has made the adjustment almost unnoticeable, and some will protest that C can move directly to C# in F without the need of any “theoretical” intervening step. Be that as it may, I would argue that where a composer is mixing tonal and nontonal elements, diatonic expectations might in fact have greater impact on a listener's experience because the listener has to parse alternative harmonic fields. When the triads are of mutually exclusive pitch content, such as interview chords j–f (D major and B♭ minor)—one of the major–minor pairs that add up to 12569T (014589)—the motion from one to the other implicitly entails two unstable intervals being reinterpreted as stable ones.

In this connection, I want to suggest something quite speculative and not likely to have been conscious on Britten's part. If my sense of the psychoacoustical mechanics entailed by these

62. This could be called a “slide” had Britten harmonized the voice with a C minor triad instead of the F dominant $\frac{4}{3}$ —it amounts to much the same thing phenomenologically, if not theoretically; the first line sung in the first scene of act 1 (“Pull, my bantams!”) also picks it up, complete with the more helpful harmonization. The evident connection between the two passages suggests that a contrapuntal rather than a harmonic definition is more apt.

progressions of cross-related chords is in tune with his, perhaps they seemed right to him *because* of the two-step reinterpretation of intervals involved. In the case of the first two interview chords, F major followed by A major, the unstable diminished 4th A–D \flat becomes the stable major third A–C \sharp , but in the process, a diatonic motion, C–D \flat is lost in favor of a less stable chromatic one, C–C \sharp ; this is what creates the sense of a cross-relation, especially given the registral displacements characteristic of the interview. The process, then, gains and loses stability at the same time. If an increase in stability—such as dissonance resolution—can be a metaphor for “good,” then might not this zero-sum progression symbolize the theme that “the good has never been perfect”? We can even imagine that Vere must have said something very much like this to Billy during the interview—indeed, probably made several different attempts to say it, for he goes in not knowing what he is going to say. Billy seems to have gotten the idea of “fate” from what Vere said to him, though the captain is more likely to have spoken in Platonic terms such as “necessity.”

Considering the integral connection between 014 and the interview chords, and between that trichord and the verdict motive, as well as the pervasiveness of the verdict motive following the trial, it is possible that the first eight interview chords *subliminally suggest that motive* (see ex. 15b). The cross relations and the adjustments they entail might make the listener focus, at least subconsciously, on the motion of inner voices. Note that for the most part the motivic lines comprise inner-voice tones that are also mostly adjacent. They might best be called “potential” lines, but for that very reason their effect would be subliminal. (Given that the conscious mind is in the habit of protecting itself from subconscious perceptions, might this be what lies behind the universal need to *assert* what would seem to be completely obvious, that there are “no motives” to be heard in the interview?) The sentence of the court would be the first thing Vere would “say” to Billy. There follow two more possible hidden references to the motive, both like the first, closely coordinated with the harmonic unfolding of 11 tones (again, because no major or minor triad containing B \sharp can harmonize the members of the F major triad). Note especially what may be seen as precursors to the a¹–k alternation, 014589–k and b⁵–k. In this regard, Clifford Hindley’s demonstration that the first six triads of the interview recur (at T₁₁) at the entrance of Vere and the trial officers to the execution is especially interesting (they, like the other representative groups from the crew who are entering, are characterized by music with which

they had earlier been associated).⁶³ The ordering of the chords is different—shuffled (in a manner reminiscent of the shuffling of end words in successive stanzas of a sestina): first, *last*, second, third, *next to last*, *third from last* (see ex.15c). More to the point, the shuffling makes any subliminal reference to the verdict motive impossible—it is far too late in the trajectory of the plot for that, anyway—and the motive has already emerged into the foreground. The seventh and eighth interview triads, which completed the chromatic, the harmonic motion between transpositions of 014589, and the supposed subliminal motive, are also omitted in the later passage. The subliminal references to the verdict motive may seem dubious. When, however, the interview chords return for the last time, a reference to the verdict is very clear *once it is pointed out* (in other words, it must be considered subliminal because no one has mentioned it till now).

The moment of Billy's hanging (like the interview, offstage, but unlike it, in full view of all on board) is portrayed by the two-part setting of the verdict motive that was introduced in the interlude between Billy's last scene (act 2, scene 3) and the execution (scene 4). As he is lifted into the air, the orchestra states eight pitches, the verdict, 0E9T8, and the rising counterpoint, 0145. Recognizing that the verdict motive is in effect two 3rds, minor and major, "hanging" from their common upper tone (09 and 08), thus an elaboration of the 014 trichord 890, we can see that the passage composes out 014589 at T_0 —that is, at the interview transposition. In other words, although the subliminal statement of the motive in the first few chords of the interview involves different members of the collection, as the verdict is carried out the motive emerges on the surface of the music with the same collection of pitches! The four pitches not sounded at the moment of Billy's death will be heard in the final moments of the opera (see ex.17b, below).

What may be so *obvious* as to be not readily apparent is that the logical extension in musical and dramatic terms of labeling the first sound in the opera as a single entity is seeing a single person, Vere, at the core of the drama. Compare Donald Mitchell's comments on the beginning

63. Clifford Hindley, "Britten's *Billy Budd*: The 'Interview Chords' Again," *Musical Quarterly* 78 (1994): 99–126. Hindley's identification of C major as the tonal goal of the interview is clearly wrong (for one thing, act 3 in the original ended with F major), but if his assignment of chord functions is faulty, his musical perceptions are good: C major does sound like a point of "rest"—as a *half* cadence can—and the following F major does in fact sound like a "fresh start." One other aspect of his argument, that F minor represents fate, rather than merely Claggart, seems to me especially well supported.

of the opera—very perceptive (even if not rigorously analytical), like much of what he has to say: Mitchell finds that the two 3rds, B♭–D (04) and B♯–D (14), in the string lines represent two different “authorities” even before these dramatic magnetic poles are embodied in characters, specifically, Vere and Claggart.⁶⁴ He wants to suggest that we should see a struggle between two opposed kinds of authority, represented by those two figures, rather than a conflict between good and evil (in the persons of Billy and Claggart). This is a view worth considering, especially because it is a convincing version of what Vere as narrator might *believe*. It also avoids the simplistic—in Mitchell’s words—“cowboy movie” approach. It does cause some difficulty with Vere as *protagonist*, however. Mitchell suggests that there is a shift after Billy kills Claggart: The death creates a new situation in which what has been a contest between the two authorities becomes an inner conflict of two types of authority within Vere. Certainly this would have been one way of structuring the story, but in my opinion it makes a muddle of the framing Prologue and Epilogue. If we are to take Vere as the locus of the conflict, symbolized by the dual role of B♭ as salvation and discipline (this seems to have been what both Britten and Forster had in mind and motivated the addition of the frame, one of the first decisions the team, including Eric Crozier, made),⁶⁵ then Claggart must be considered as much a projection, in his way, as Billy.

64. Mitchell, in the *Cambridge Opera Handbook*, 113f. The essay was written in two parts, separated by a dozen years (1979 and 1991). Mitchell revised the language but not the earlier opinions, wishing to preserve them as a reflection of the period when the first part was written. The second part (pp. 122–34) records not a shift so much as a deepening of Mitchell’s view of Vere, in relation to what he sees as the “triptych” *Billy Budd*, *Gloriana*, and *Turn of the Screw*, and the similarities between Vere, Queen Elizabeth, and the Governess.

65. Forster told Lionel Trilling in a letter (16 April 1949) that he aimed at “rescuing Vere from his creator.” Quoted in the *Cambridge Opera Handbook*, 55. Eric Crozier, “The Writing of *Billy Budd*,” *Opera Quarterly* 4, 3 (Autumn 1986): 11–27, quoted in Philip Reed, “From First Thoughts to First Night: A *Billy Budd* Chronology,” in the *Cambridge Opera Handbook* (pp. 48–49), makes clear that to use the frame was the product of their second day of meetings.

Beside fitting neatly with the frame, this is faithful to one way of looking at the original.⁶⁶ Melville's anonymous narrator presents both Billy and Claggart as psychologically opaque, even impenetrable—for different reasons, need it be said?—but over the course of the Melville's revisions, Vere grew into a complex psychological portrait, a personality with whom the narrator, despite all his distancing from the story, seems to identify and wants the reader to identify.⁶⁷ Put another way, if Vere is appropriately to be seen as a tragic figure, he must be the one whose act brings about his own destruction—yet superficially, that description seems to apply more to Billy. If, however both Billy and Claggart represent for Vere aspects of himself, then it is Vere's act in pursuit of discipline (which Claggart personifies) that destroys his possibility of salvation (Billy). I want to be very clear: This is not an attempt to psychologize Vere but to give due weight to the narrative structure of the opera.

My hearing of the opening is different from Mitchell's but I don't think necessarily contradictory—merely a different take on the same musical image. The queasy sound (really just short of being funny)⁶⁸ in the string lines that compose out the 014 trichord starts as an image of the sea and, more specifically, seasickness, but soon the metaphorical meaning of the sea as the moral dimension of life emerges in Vere's words, and the musical image inherits a far deeper

66. We all know “bad” people—individuals whose behavior makes it difficult for us to be charitable. What sort of behavior puts someone beyond the pale, however, says more about each of us than about those individuals, for of course the nature of the radically unacceptable action varies. In a survey of the literature concerning both Melville's story and Britten's opera, one finds that of the three major characters, only Vere arouses this varied response. It is a tribute to both works that any fictional character can evoke such different reactions, but it seems slightly odd because the other two may seem more vivid as personalities. Yet it may account for the relatively little objection to the flashback frame, the most obvious feature of the opera that could have been seen as a major distortion of the original. The frame seems right because it brings out something that is latent in the original: Vere is the only “real” person.

67. Andrew Delblanco, *Melville: His World and Work* (New York: Knopf, 2005), 314, considers whether the relationship of Vere to Billy is colored by Melville's with his sons, both of whom died young, one a suicide.

68. Britten's first sketch was in “eighteenth-century” sixteenth notes rather than eighths. This would not necessarily have changed the sound, but it might have subtly projected a sense of the music that was too parodic to be appropriate.

meaning of moral uncertainty and conflict (as in Sartre's *nausée*). In the theater, generally, a common, almost clichéd trope taken as the basis of a system of metaphors can be quite powerful. Here, a stock trope that was unspoken in the Melville, "at sea," is brought nearer the surface in the libretto but retains its "depth" and power by being transformed into a network of musical relationships.⁶⁹

Thus, while the initial impact of the interview scene derives in some measure from its very lack of any leitmotifs (at least on the surface) and thus of motivic connection to what has preceded it—particularly after the motivically freighted trial scene, as Philip Rupprecht suggests—it is on a deeper level fully connected to the matter of the opera harmonically through the 014 trichord and the 014589 hexachord.⁷⁰ As the climax of the work it would have to be. The interview scene as climax makes workable an unusual dramatic structure, one with two anticlimaxes: the frustrated battle scene and the execution leading to the abortive mutiny. Even without the anticlimaxes, it could be essential to the structure as a whole because the flashback frame of the Prologue and Epilogue is inherently anticlimactic. Not to feel tacked on, the Epilogue must tell us something new, but it would ring false for the new element to be any kind of true information since that would require withholding it till then, which the audience might resent as narrative "cheating." What is new therefore has to be either (1) a deeper understanding in the form of a more inclusive context that makes a better interpretation of the facts possible (the classic detective story model, in which a relatively inconsequential piece of the puzzle suddenly allows for everything around it to "fall into place") or (2) *false* information, which acts

69. Mervyn Cooke, in the *Cambridge Opera Handbook* (pp. 21–22), points out, following W. H. Auden, that Melville's *White-Jacket: The World in a Man-of-War* had made this system of metaphors explicit.

70. Rupprecht (pp. 84ff) wants to make much of the fact that the frame caused Britten to introduce motives into the Prologue without the verbal referents that theorists of the use of leitmotifs from Wagner on have insisted are indispensable, thereby justifying the Epilogue as a locus for bringing back the now properly verbally supported leitmotifs. In fact, however, despite its close parallels to the Prologue, the Epilogue is remarkable for how different it is—though the changes are subtle, as I said—both in what it doesn't bring back and in what it adds. Besides, the leitmotifs of *Billy Budd*, and much else in the music, have a common harmonic source, and their reference remains less specific than the operatic norm throughout. (These two aspects of the opera's music are probably related to each other.)

through irony to give the audience a deeper understanding. In *Billy Budd* it is the second alternative, and the false information is Vere's salvation.

The true answer to Vere's question at the end of the Prologue, "Who saved me?" is *no one*. Even though, in the Epilogue, Vere asserts of Billy that "he has saved me," note (in ex.16) the similarities and the differences with the lines just before, where Vere admits that he "could have saved" Billy, but didn't. The melody, both lines rising a 3rd from D, reflects his desires to make the parallelism. Vere's confusion is apparent in that the actual parallel—*neither saved the other*—is the opposite of what he thinks he is asserting. The first line, however, is harmonically supported, while the second is, unusually for Britten, completely unsupported. There are troubling echoes of the trial in "Even his shipmates knew it" and of the descending 4th of Claggart's "O beauty" in "the love that passes understanding has come to me." (The parallel Vere as conscious narrative artist wants to make in the latter case is probably to "I have also read books . . . and tried to fathom eternal truth," in the Prologue.) If only on the level where unwelcome truth intrudes into consciousness as unintended words, even Vere knows he is lying.

After the opening bars of the Prologue, the 014 trichord continues to make its unsettling presence felt in the second phrase of Vere's opening line, the melisma on the word "experienced" (see ex.13a); the five-note cambiatalike figure seems with its circumscribed movement to belie his assertion that he has "experienced much." If, in an objective sense, it is true that Vere's life has been full of incident, the doubt he musically—"unconsciously," so to speak—expresses may reflect his sense of apartness from others (a theme so much developed in the Melville original that although negative comments on Vere are put in the mouths of fools, they have again sometimes been taken at face value).⁷¹ Recall that his nickname, "Starry Vere," has a double-edged meaning: He is a character of some glory in the view of others, but his head is often "in the clouds," as well. It may be that the story of Billy Budd looms so large for him because it was the occasion when his inability to "connect" had its most disastrous consequences. ("Only connect!" was famously "the whole of [Margaret Schlegel's] sermon" in

71. The heavy going Edward T. Cone, Peter Kivy, and others make of what music *does* in opera and other vocal music is discussed briefly in appendix 1. The review of Rupprecht by David Beard, "Britten's Ambiguities; Tippet's Times; Metzger's Borrowings," *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 129, 2 (2004): 305–23, contains a good summary citation of the high points of this literature (n.8, p.307).

Forster's *Howards End*. Vere, unlike Henry Wilcox, has the intellectual and moral capacity, but he fails just the same.)

The currently fashionable “bad Vere,” a man who knows that his own actions are contrary to law, is based on a confusion of fiction and reality—very postmodern to be sure.⁷² That artists of the caliber of Britten and Forster (or Melville) would have any interest in such a simplistic conception is ludicrous and contrary to Forster's express aim to “rescue Vere” from Melville. Forster may in fact have been one of those to mistake Melville's elaborate (not to say labored) obfuscation of Vere's “accents of remorse”—if my reading of the passage quoted at the beginning of this study is correct and it is part of the author's grim joke that history gets everything wrong: Billy a monster of depravity, probably a foreigner; Claggart (perhaps *really* a foreigner) a “respectable” man motivated by a pure “patriotic impulse”; and Vere . . . without remorse. If so, it was a creative misreading for which we must be vastly grateful.

Vere's tragedy is that he is a good man who fails to act for the good, a good man who does evil. His words about good being flawed are so poignant because they apply to himself—something he knows but cannot acknowledge. That is a more profound reason for the Epilogue literally to continue the Prologue from where it left off, with some very close musical parallels, as we saw. The differences, however—both the easily recognized and the subtle ones—are in the end more important.

One feature of the Prologue that does not return is the B section, with the stammer figures and the trill, yet note how the voice in the Epilogue repeatedly moves up by step to the top-line F, just as it did in the Prologue's line “There is always some flaw in it, some defect.” This leads the ear toward the climactic F# of “O what have I done?” and it is from that point—seemingly the most exact parallel to the Prologue—that the Epilogue's most obvious and most subtle

72. The idea that somehow readers of the story or viewers of the opera would know that British naval law was not as portrayed is something only a legal scholar could believe. See Richard H. Weisberg, *The Failure of the Word: The Protagonist as Lawyer in Modern Fiction* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 155, cited in Delblanco (p.384, an endnote to p.309). The point is mentioned by Cooke in the Cambridge Opera Handbook (p. 31; see also p.158, n. 9 and 10), and Stephen Arthur Allen (cited in n.28, above) also proposes a knowingly guilty Vere, based on the undeniable legal facts, though his argument is framed in Christian terms.

differences flow. Most obvious is Vere's recapitulation, "*molto tranquillo*," of Billy's cabaletta. Besides beginning quietly and slowly, and over not a pedal D but a recall of the interview chords—which clash harmonically with the tune—it reverses Billy's *scena* in the use of motive 2a, starting with the last form Billy used (P: E♭–D–B♭–C) and ending with the first (R: G–F–A–B♭). Note also that the interview chords here seem to move in reverse, beginning as they ended in the interview, alternating a¹–k, then gradually interpolating other chords.

The most remarkable difference between the Prologue and the Epilogue is in the use of the verdict motive in the Epilogue. We saw how it pervades Billy's final scene, suggesting that his impending execution is never far from his thoughts. That it is more hidden in the Epilogue may suggest the difference between Billy's ultimate acceptance of his fate and Vere's inability to accept it. First heard in the setting of the word "requiem," where the presence of the voice allows Britten to make a small change (dropping the pitch A) that brings out the motive (see ex.17a), it is then echoed with the same pitches at the end of the "O what have I done?" passage, immediately before the transformed recall of Billy's cabaletta. Here, even more remarkably, this echo of the verdict motive is nested in a large-scale reference to it in another subliminal inner-voice line of adjacent tones built into the 029 trichords that accompany "O what have I done?" (F♯–F–E♭ . . . and then—by adding a trichord not in the Prologue for the next pitch—E♯; the final pitch of the motive, D, could be thought to be any of the numerous instances of that pitch in what follows, but in a poetic sense, the motive is only complete with the last note of the opera).

The third statement of the verdict motive comes with the return of the interview chords under Vere's paraphrase of Billy's cabaletta. Note that the previous two references to the verdict in the Epilogue composed out 014 as TE2 (R. 141 –3) and 236 (R.142). The third reference composes out 67T, completing the hexachord TE2367 (014589 at T₁₀, the Prologue transposition). After the alternation of a¹–k, which allows Britten to sneak into the reemergence of the chords so that they seem to be already sounding before one is quite aware of them,⁷³ the verdict begins with the

73. Forster apparently missed the return of the chords altogether at an early run-through, much to Britten's annoyance, according to Donald Mitchell's 16 November 1987 interview with Basil Douglas, cited in Paul Kildea, "On Ambiguity in Britten," in *Rethinking Britten*, ed. by Philip Rupprecht (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 13 (p.18, n.24).

same B \flat (just below middle C) as the one that begins Vere's melody, in a B \flat major triad. The next chord is A major—ostensibly because Vere is as “content” as Billy. It is just at this point that Vere's melody diverges from Billy's, though when the A in the same register proceeds to G by way of the last repetition of a¹–k in the opera, we might still believe in Vere's salvation. The next chord, however, is A \flat major, and the verdict motive can no longer be ignored; in the register of the motive the A \flat is played by the alto saxophone (associated with the Novice, who failed as Claggart's tool), an instrument rarely used after the Novice disappears from the story *except* in the several interview chord series. The final pitch of the motive, F \sharp , is part of a D major triad played by the trombones alone.⁷⁴ The last two chords occur in reverse order from their appearance as the two chords in Billy's final lines that were not derived from 014589 at T₀ (refer back to ex.7e), and the D major chord accompanies Vere's use of the word *anchor*.

It is perhaps that word that pulls Vere back again to the “faraway summer” (that he so wants it to have been Edenic is what the huge cadence on B \flat tells us). Yet, as I suggested, Billy hanging from the yardarm is at once Christ the Savior on the cross but also an anchor that was lowered into the deep in an attempt to maintain order and regain, figuratively, a safe harbor. Can we doubt that at the end the image of that moment is once again before Vere's eyes? Recall that only eight pitches sounded when Billy was hanged, 014589TE. Subtracting them from the total chromatic leaves 2367, which, with TE, form the complementary transposition of the hexachord. The Epilogue of course picks up the conflict of B \flat and B \sharp (TE) from the Prologue, and never resolves it (the awful B \sharp of “seventeen hundred and ninety-seven”). And 2367 are four of Vere's last five sung pitches, 673(5)2—another long-range completion.

But if the harmonic “content” is resolved, the motivic “form” is not. Vere's every word in the Epilogue is haunted—even his apotheosis of hope in future salvation echoes with the rhythm of the drums at Billy's execution, and as he casts his mind back once again—helplessly, it seems (and in turning back to the past, “centuries ago,” he returns us to the present)—his very last line, as example 17b shows, echoes with Melville-like irony both “This is our moment” (indeed it was!) and, once again, once again, the fatal verdict motive, “hanging from the yardarm.”

74. Rupprecht, *Britten's Musical Language*, 131, contends that the trombones, as a distinct choir associated with Claggart, are not heard after his death.

Appendix 1: *Billy Budd* in *Britten's Musical Language* by Philip Rupprecht

Of all the treatments of *Billy Budd*, Philip Rupprecht's chapter on the opera in his book *Britten's Musical Language* is particularly frustrating for me, with its formidable intellectual arsenal, which, more than simply being impressive, makes me feel as if I am, so to speak, *being* impressed. To say this may be unfair to Rupprecht, who is faithfully doing what is expected of a "young officer": he has read widely and thought deeply about what he has read. Thus, I hope my comments do not seem unfriendly. My frustration comes of the sense that his wide reading has not left him time to think deeply enough about the music. He seems to have good musical instincts and usually grasps quickly what is going on in a piece of music, but music is very hard to think about—at least as hard as literary theory or philosophy. To invoke the trope of taking "on faith" his understanding of the extramusical ideas he marshals in his discussion would be to raise doubt about that understanding, and I have no right to do that. I do, however, feel within my rights to point out where Rupprecht misinterprets musical details, and even to guess that it is because he is relying on his own easy grasp of music.

For example, a major critical idea of his essay hinges on Rupprecht's hearing harmonic "slides" (see n.22, above) in the music and identifying them with the villain, John Claggart. I don't dispute that the slides exist or that they have some significance (though I don't like the *term*), but one ought to find them only when they do occur. To see a *slide* where it does not occur calls to mind the trope of trying to build a solid argument on a slippery foundation. Unfortunately, Rupprecht gives several examples of slides (including the first one in the opera) that are patently not what he says they are (see ex.A1a and A1b). Rupprecht also makes no distinction between the two directions a slide can take, major–minor and vice versa. It is not an idea that I pursue—believing my explanation of the same phenomena in terms of the trichord 014 is more apt—but the *feeling* conveyed certainly would be different depending on a slide's direction.

My joking reference to Rupprecht as a "young officer" is also aimed at opening up the (surely annoying) dimension of "ethics" in music scholarship. To make a mistake in identifying a chord is something any of us can do; to make a mistake the basis of a critical argument about a major work of art is more problematic—but ultimately no more than an embarrassment. In any case, critical ideas battle it out and many of them sink. My quarrel here is with an approach that

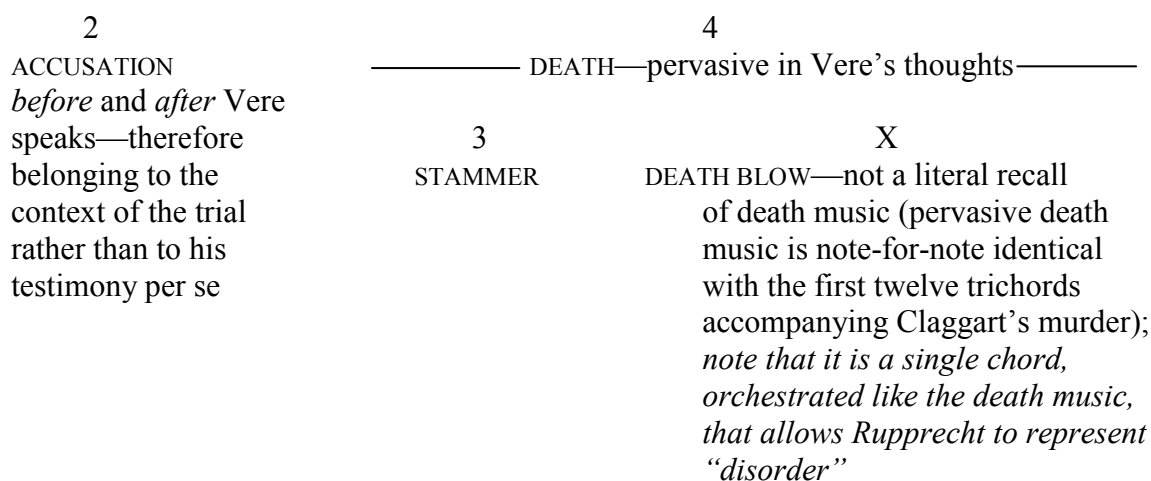
finds musical details to support big ideas rather than building toward the big ideas from close reading. Confirmation bias is a perennial temptation, and it ought to go without saying that no one who attempts to express ideas about music (or anything else) is immune. It is naturally an even greater temptation when the work being studied is concerned with moral issues.

The identity of the agent of Billy's destruction is one of the moral cruxes of the opera, and Rupprecht, by examining the use of leitmotifs in the orchestra, seeks to clarify how responsibility passes from Claggart to Vere. When Rupprecht (p.129) qualifies his initial claim that "the orchestral voice in the first ritornello of the trial scene *is* Claggart's alone"—by allowing that the narrative voice now stands "beyond the viewpoint of any one character on stage"—I find his revision more convincing. If, however, the *old* Vere is the "narrator" of the whole opera (as the Prologue and Epilogue suggest, and Rupprecht provisionally accepts), there is no reason (such as Rupprecht supposes there is) why Vere can't remember Claggart's act 1 deeds even though he didn't witness them. As narrator, Vere has the privilege of fiction: he can invent; our only demand is that his invention be plausible. His quotations of Claggart's music and knowledge of his actions are most simply explained in this way, obviating the need for an elaborate merger of the two characters into one "actant."

The *young* Vere feels himself trapped into carrying out what Claggart started, and I hear the ritornelli of the trial scene as belonging to the *situation*, which (like the French ship) has escaped Vere's ability to control. Vere's inability to do more than sing a single pitch is a psychologically precise image of his feeling forced to participate against his will. He later acknowledges, in the Epilogue, that this wasn't true ("I could have saved him"), but at the time, his recent actions having had such dire unintended consequences, he retreated into virtual inaction. It is quite believable that he would do so, being one who "has been a man of action . . . [but has] also read books and studied and pondered and tried to fathom eternal truth." (The very sentence enacts his disposition to dwell on things.)⁷⁵

75. In the original, Vere is the one who talks the court into finding Billy guilty, and one of several things that Melville may well have intended Vere's name to evoke is the unspoken play on words "Vere dict." In the opera, it is Vere's inability to speak and save Billy that opens up an alternative system of parallels (Billy's fatal inability to speak in anger; his failed attempt to save Vere by blessing him).

Rupprecht expresses a cautious attitude toward diagrams,⁷⁶ and indeed he allows his diagram of the recall of leitmotifs in the orchestra during Vere's testimony to mislead him into thinking that the "*order* of musical events . . . is disturbed" (p.104). My revision of his diagram would show no disturbance of the order, as follows:



Rupprecht comes close to contradicting himself here (and this is what makes me believe he allowed his own diagram to mislead him): his beautifully perceptive remark that the duration of Claggart's death is "stretched" in Vere's mind means that the death cannot both be what preoccupies him—what he "cannot get out of his mind"—and yet at the same time participate in some disturbed ordering of events.

An example of how Rupprecht allows his ideas to overcome his perceptions appears in his discussion of the music of Claggart's accusation (pp.99ff.). Rupprecht clearly wants to grant music its full expressive capability in the face of the commonsense academic commonplace that it is lacking when compared with words. (But a dead language suffers rather from a lack of speakers than from any inherent semantic imprecision.) He notes the rising tessitura and acknowledges its connection to Claggart's "advance" toward Billy (though his attempt to distinguish the prose's "advanced" from the music's *advances* feels glib). Because his larger argument relies on the idea that music cannot provide precise parallels to specific narrative detail, he misses the fact that much of Melville's description of the scene (chapter 19) has indeed

76. He refers his wariness to Barthes (n.9, p.310, called out on p.82).

been translated by Britten into music. It hardly needs be said that music cannot be reliably translated back into words; just as obviously, there is, as Rupprecht says, no musical equivalent to the words “an asylum physician,” but “Claggart . . . advanced within short range of Billy” is what the rising tessitura is about; “with measured step and calm collected air” is heard in the slow “step” of the timpani and double basses; and even “mesmerically looking him in the eye” can be heard in the low woodwind trills—which, as trills, are of course also “indications of the coming paroxysm”! Trills are, after all, among other things, about the suspension of time.

One area in which Rupprecht’s discussion is extremely worthwhile, a major focus of his *Billy Budd* chapter, is his treatment of the role of the orchestra in opera. This is a debate where much of what has been written seems to me to overlook the obvious, namely, that the composer’s contribution most resembles that of the director of a play, providing a “reading”—in both the local and global senses—of the words. Music can certainly suggest some ideas more readily than what a director might have an actor do, but although music’s ability to interpret the words differs from a director’s in the sorts of readings it can provide (thus still leaving room for a director to shape the meaning of an opera), what music is doing is not that different in kind: controlling pace, emphasis, and so on. It might, for example, be easier for music to suggest a character’s thoughts with some specificity through the use of a leitmotiv than it would be by an actor’s reading of a line, or posture or behavior while reading it. Also, where an actor might read the same line cheerfully or angrily, in a pleading tone or with an insolent manner, music will greatly limit the purport of the reading. A nonchalant reading by itself may suggest a range of possibilities, including lack of interest or awareness, or the wish to pretend to those states; a nonchalant reading with, say, angry music suggests only the presence of anger and a wish to hide it. “Just what is ‘angry’ music?” is the question being begged, but the essays of Cone and Kivy⁷⁷ and others seem to defer this problem by focusing on words. Rupprecht’s discussion of the “narrative” role of the orchestra is particularly valuable in connection with these issues. The question, for example, of whether the *characters* (as opposed to the singers) can “hear” the orchestra is, as Rupprecht says, not after all as important as the question of its effect on the listener.

77. Cited in n.71, above.

Appendix 2: Characters in Opera and Motives in Music

The evolution of tonality out of the modal system around the time of the Protestant reformation was seen by Max Weber, in *Rational and Social Foundations of Music*,⁷⁸ as not coincidental. Such sociology on a grand scale is out of fashion—but not merely that: it is of its nature metaphorical and therefore slippery. It is suggestive rather than—as one assumes Weber would have hoped—determinative in a scientific way. It still has a useful elucidative role nonetheless when it is brought back to the particulars we now feel more comfortable talking about.

For Weber the rationalism of the tonal system was a manifestation of the general rationalization of European society in the early modern period, most evident in the joint rise of capitalism and the Protestant reformation. The organization of the tones of the scale in relation to a single tone by their harmonic distance (measured in perfect 5ths) was an exemplary rationalization in a superstructural realm that Weber thought reflected the sorts of rationalization proceeding in structural areas, such as the organization of the means of material production. Moreover, he thought that the forms rationalization took were not random but shared what could be called themes. For example, individuals were now to be directly involved in their own salvation—spiritual entrepreneurs, one might say—rather than seeking salvation through the intercession of the Church. Weber thought this was mirrored in the tonal system's basic principle of making a single pitch what all the other pitches derive their meaning from.

Whether or not one finds this convincing, there is at least a kind of poetic truth to Weber's idea that social change is reflected in the new division of musical texture between melody (the individual) and harmony (society) beyond the slightly simpleminded image of soloist and chorus. I think Schenker's division of a musical structure between *diatony* and a contrapuntal/harmonic *Ursatz* is both more sophisticated musically and gives a more nuanced metaphor for the relationship of the individual to society.⁷⁹ Diatony, which can be understood as a kind of melodic drive, seems for Schenker to be a trajectory not unlike that of a romantic hero's life, and some

78. Translated and edited by Don Martindale, Johannes Riedel, and Gertrude Neuwirth (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1958).

79. What holds them together for Schenker is that they are expressions of various relationships potential to the triad. Schenker believed, of course, that the triad ultimately derived from a single tone and its overtones.

such metaphor just below the surface partly accounts for Schenker's overheated rhetoric. In any case, to put it in a way less likely to beg questions: Given the capitalist/rationalized structure of modern life, and given tonality, the musical organizing principle of a single central pitch came to be a metaphor for the enhanced role of individual agency.

This metaphor evolved along with the music's evolution from the single motivic texture (*Affekt*) of Baroque music through the transitional confrontation of two textures/affects of *Empfindenstil* to the sonata principle of contrasting subjects/themes (though they were often *motivically related*, if in a hidden way). The genius of the tonal system, that its entire structure can be replicated at different locations within the system (tonicization/modulation), allowed for the subject/protagonist—usually quite directly a composed-out tonic triad—to remain recognizable though changed by changed circumstances. The result was that tonality ultimately made possible the creation of something like a narrative in which the protagonist was an exemplar of the system itself. With the wane of tonality, the motive remained an organizing principle, though it was increasingly detached from the harmonic structure, and there was a lingering quasi- (or pseudo-) tonal reliance on “referential transposition.” Comparing Schoenberg's method with tonality, it becomes evident that the use of a motive both as such but also as the structural principle (row)—while it bears some resemblance to the workings of tonality and although it provided a basis for the creation of very fine music—lacks the staying power of the earlier system. Analogously, we can see that the argument from design in creationist biology may not only be factually wrong but get wrong the basic processes by which complexity arises. The tonal system, too, (unlike Schoenberg's) was not designed but evolved in the hands of scores of practitioners over hundreds of years.

The reader may well be wondering where I am headed with this admittedly potted history. In view of the origin of the flat symbol as an uncial *b*, making *B♭* in effect equivalent to *bb*—i.e., Britten's initials and those of his title character—one may speculate, however idly, whether this signifies an identification of Billy Budd with this pitch and, less pertinently, with the composer.⁸⁰ I will now suggest an idea that might seem to some readers to go completely

80. Mervyn Cooke, in the *Cambridge Opera Handbook* (p.164, n.33 to ch.4), cites a diary jotting indicating that Britten may have planned the premiere for his thirty-eighth birthday, November 22, 1951. And in a recent book edited by Rupprecht, *Rethinking Britten* (see n.73, above), 102–27, Cooke has a

overboard: Vere's desperate hold onto B \flat at the end of the opera (the overassertive final orchestral triad at R.144+4)—even as his memory draws him away from it—could be Britten's way of composing the *embrace* between Vere and Billy that Melville speculates about in the avoided interview scene of the original.⁸¹ (And in defense of this line of thought, Melville's speculative stance toward the “facts” of his story represents both one of its themes and a model for the reader to follow.)

If the speculation, that clinging to B \flat embodies Vere's memory of an embrace, grasps what Britten intended, bringing that idea into musical form was an astounding compositional feat. In the story, by contrast, the speculation about the embrace comes off with ponderous

chapter, “Be Flat or Be Natural? Pitch Symbolism in Britten's Operas,” in which he cleverly traces some of the significance that Britten gave to the pitches B \flat and B \sharp in *Billy Budd* and other operas to jocular schoolboy sayings of the composer's youth: “Sometimes B \sharp , never B \flat , but always B \sharp ” and the like. Later in the essay (pp.121ff.), Cooke also discusses Britten's lifelong interest in musical initials (e.g., in pieces dedicated to others) and notes that among his siblings (all of whom had names starting with B), Ben was known as the “fourth B,” in a play on the canonic “three B's,” Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms. My objections to some of Cooke's interpretations of pitch symbolism still hold.

81. Emslie (p.56) rightly points out that Melville's “speculation” is in fact about a fictional event that he is the sole source for, but the change of narrative strategy ought not to be simply dismissed (as Emslie comes close to doing) as a “game.” Especially after the lengthy quotation of speeches at the trial, the narrator's speculation about the interview *does* create a gap in the narrative that corresponds—at least in its placement—to the gap in the opera. It is not, *pace* Emslie, to be explained as merely the logical outcome of the narrative “facts” that there were no others present and both men are dead (surely all those living in 1797 would have been long dead by Melville's time, even were they not fictional); there are several verbatim private conversations between characters “now dead” that are unlikely to have been recorded anywhere—Billy with Dansker, for instance—so the question, Why is it precisely about the interview that Melville “speculates”? is a very apt one.

W. H. Auden, *The Enchafèd Flood, or The Romantic Iconography of the Sea* (New York, 1949), 143–44, is quoted in Mervyn Cooke, “Herman Melville's *Billy Budd*,” in the *Cambridge Opera Handbook* (pp. 23–24) as disapproving of the interview scene in the original because it would have been where the transition from Billy as Adam to Billy as Christ would have taken place.

embarrassment.⁸² W. H. Auden writes that music cannot “say an existence is wrong” and elsewhere that “Music . . . [has] only the Present Tense,”⁸³ suggesting that it cannot express the psychic division of embarrassment over a recollected event. Suppose him right: The acceptance (Auden calls it “forgiveness”) that music must grant to events does not gainsay the possibility of a different kind of division, namely, ambivalence. A portrayal of an embrace in Vere’s recollection would enact his desire to overcome ambivalence—by the assertion of the final B \flat after the literal doubleness of the harmony in the preceding measures. In Auden’s present tense, ambivalence is perhaps overcome, but taking the passage as a whole and in context, the very need to assert B \flat so powerfully must be seen to express ambivalence as Vere’s most basic psychological state. As Emslie might say, Britten’s music seems to attempt to “put over” the idea of salvation, and in failing to do so, undercuts the idea. The only element of this reading about which Emslie and I might differ is whether this constitutes a deconstruction (an acknowledgment of the impossibility of completeness in a work of art) or is more intentionally focused on the implausibility of Vere’s salvation.

Appendix 3: Why the Climax of the Prologue Doesn’t Use All Twelve Tones

It seems odd that the climax of the B section of the Prologue, where the stammer motive sounds in fearsome parallel trichords (013), does not use all twelve tones. The table on the next page shows, however, that no parallel trichordal harmonization of any of the three forms of the motive can do so. The top row is the normal order⁸⁴ of the four-pitch collection used in each of the three versions of the motive. To construct parallel trichords, the collection would have to be added to two transpositions of itself. Some transpositions have no pitches in common—indicated by an initial *zero*—but in all such cases the pitches left over (after the arrow) cannot form a *third*

82. Melville’s strong implication is that the embrace was fatherly—he mentions the difference in Vere’s and Billy’s ages, and alludes to Abraham and Isaac (a father-son relationship with other resonances, to be sure). But this can be read either as an attempt to disguise its homosexual aspect or as an acknowledgment of the connection of the story to his own experiences as a father (see n.68, above). Take your pick.

83. Auden, “The Composer,” line 13; “Dichtung und Wahrheit,” VIII.

84. I use 0159 instead of the true normal order (0348) to make obvious its similarity to the two other forms and its source in the 014589 hexachord.

0 1 4 8 +	0 1 5 8 +	0 1 5 9 +
1: 1 2 5 9 → 3 6 7 T E*	1: 1 2 6 9 → 3 4 7 T E*	1: 1 2 6 T → 3 4 7 8 E*
0: 2 3 6 T → 5 7 9 E (WT)	0: 2 3 7 T → 4 6 9 E	0: 2 3 7 E → 4 6 8 T (WT)
1: 3 4 7 E → 2 5 6 9 T*	1: 3 4 8 E → 2 6 7 9 T*	1: 3 4 8 0 → 2 6 7 T E*
4 5 8 0	4 5 9 0	4 5 9 1
1: 5 6 9 1 → 2 3 7 T E*	5 6 T 1	1: 5 6 T 2 → 3 4 7 8 E*
0: 6 7 T 2 → 3 5 9 E (WT)	0: 6 7 E 2 → 3 4 9 T	0: 6 7 E 3 → 2 4 8 T (WT)
1: 7 8 E 3 → 2 5 6 9 T*	7 8 0 3	1: 7 8 0 4 → 2 3 6 T E*
8 9 0 4	8 9 1 4	8 9 1 5
1: 9 T 1 5 → 2 3 6 7 E*	1: 9 T 2 5 → 3 4 6 7 E*	1: 9 T 2 6 → 3 4 7 8 E*
0: T E 2 6 → 3 5 7 9 (WT)	0: T E 3 6 → 2 4 7 9	0: T E 3 7 → 2 4 6 8 (WT)
1: E 0 3 7 → 2 5 6 9 T*	1: E 0 4 7 → 2 3 6 9 T*	1: E 0 4 8 → 2 3 6 7 T*
* 0159(2x), 0158	* 0148, 0159	* 0148(2x), 0158

transposition of the motive.⁸⁵ Some transpositions have one pitch in common, so if we add a pedal tone, such as Britten's C# trill, it might seem possible that all twelve tones could be used. As the asterisked footnotes indicate, however, it unfortunately turns out that in every one of these cases, the five pitches left over can only be the basis of the *other two* versions of the motive. This is why the climactic presentation of the 0159 version of the motive in parallel chords (R.3 –3) uses only eleven pitches, even with the trill. (There is, by the way, no trill that can supply both the eleventh and twelfth pitches, even if we were, rather unmusically, to count both tones.) My hunch is that all of this comes as a result of using nonsymmetrical subsets of a symmetrical collection (014589). Britten would hardly have had to approach this as systematically or theoretically as I have, however, since six of the possible ten combinations of three transpositions use eleven tones with an added pedal.

Appendix 4: How the Opera Might Have Ended with Vere “Saved”

The point of example A2—apart from allowing me to “play dress-up” (as they say in nursery school) as a great composer—is to show that Britten and his librettists could have composed an ending with a very similar general tone, using well-established motivic materials, that would have been far less ambiguous in its resolution.

85. An initial numeral *one* of course indicates one common tone; when there are two or more common tones—and therefore no way for the remaining tones all to be used—the number is not specified.